April

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Adventure

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A Full Book-Length Novel

By

LOUIS TRACY

Author of "The Wings of the Morning," "The Captain of the *Kansan*," "The Pillar of Light," etc.

A BOOK AND SOME OF THE BEST STORIES OF THE MONTH FOR 15 CENTS

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ARTHUR SULLIVANT HOFFMAN, Managing Editor

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A young American in Central America generally has some adventures, but Bobby Worden had a little more than his share. The tale moves so rapidly that the book-length novel for the next issue seems almost like a short story.

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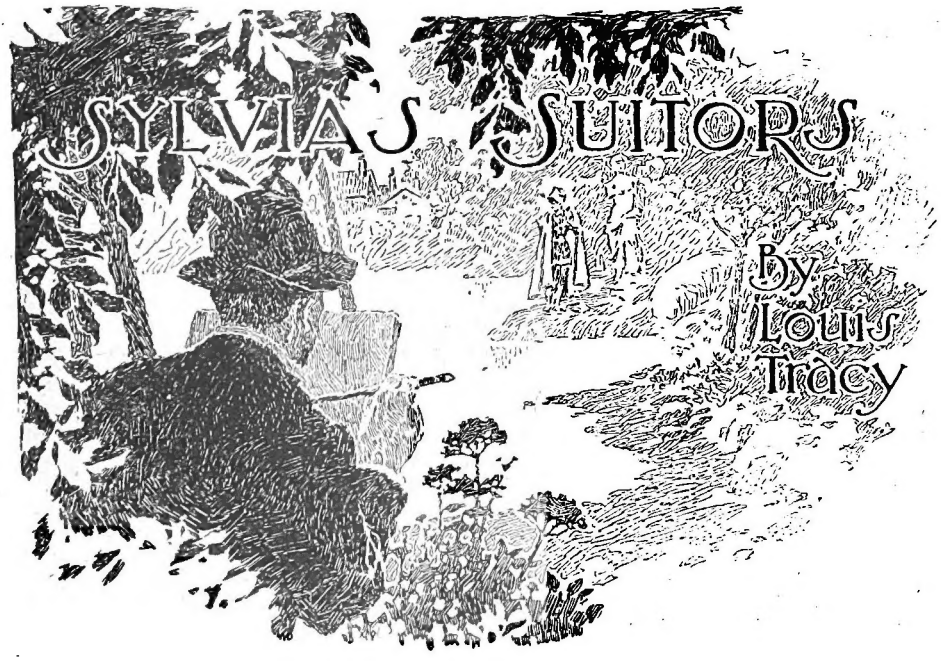

CHAPTER I

THE NYMPHS OF THE LAKE

IT MAY be taken for granted that Trenholme's interview with the gamekeeper would not have ended so amicably if the latter had known that his employer, Mortimer Fenley, had been shot dead as he stood for a moment on his own doorstep, lighting a cigar, before entering the motor car which would take him to the station two miles distant.

That knowledge was to come later, in its grimmest panoply of tragedy and horror, but a great many things would happen, and John Trenholme would pass through some strange experiences, before it was discovered who fired the shot that robbed Mortimer Fenley so mercilessly of the twenty years of life which a hale middle age might seem to warrant.

THE bright June sun that morning had found a chink in the blind and thrown a bar of vivid light across the face of the young man lying asleep in the front bedroom of the White Horse Inn at Roxton. It crept onward from a firm, well molded chin to lips now tight set, though not lacking signs that they would open readily in a smile and perhaps reveal two rows of strong, white, even teeth. Indeed, when that strip of sunshine touched and warmed them, the smile came; so the sleeper was dreaming, and pleasantly.

But the earth stays not for men, no matter what their dreams. In a few minutes

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the radiant line reached the sleeper's eyes, and he awoke. Naturally, he stared straight at the disturber of his slumbers; and being a mere man, who emulated not the ways of eagles, was routed at the first glance.

More than that, he was thoroughly aroused, and sprang out of bed with a celerity that would have given many another young man a headache during the remainder of the day.

But John Trenholme, artist by profession, was somewhat of a light-hearted vagabond by instinct; if the artist was ready to be annoyed because of an imaginary loss of precious daylight, the vagabond laughed cheerily when he blinked at a clock and learned that the hour still lacked some minutes of half past five in the morning.

"By gad," he grinned, pulling up the blind, "I was scared stiff. I thought the blessed alarm had missed fire, and that I had been lying here like a hog during the best part of the finest day England has seen this year."

Evidently he was still young enough to deal in superlatives, for there had been other fine days that Summer; moreover, in likening himself to a pig, he was ridiculously unfair to six feet of athletic symmetry in which it would be difficult to detect any marked resemblance to the animal whose name is a synonym for laziness.

On the way to the bathroom he stopped to listen for sounds of an aroused household, but the inmates of the White Horse Inn were still taking life easily.

"Eliza vows she can hear that alarm in her room," he communed. "Well, suppose we assist nature, always a laudable thing in itself, and peculiarly excellent when breakfast is thereby advanced a quarter of an hour."

Eliza was the inn's stout and voluble cook-housekeeper, and her attic lay directly above Trenholme's room. He went back for the clock, crept swiftly upstairs, opened a door a few inches, and put the infernal machine inside, close to the wall. He was splashing in the bath when a harsh and penetrating din jarred through the house, and a slight scream showed that Eliza had been duly "alarmed."

A few minutes later came a heavy thump on the bathroom door.

"All right, Mr. Trenholme!" cried an irate female voice. "You've been up to your larks, have you? It'll be my turn when I make your coffee; I'll pepper an' salt it!"

"Why, what's the matter, Eliza?" he shouted.

"Matter! Frightenin' a body like that! I thought a lot o' suffrigettes were hammerin' in the windows of the snug."

Eliza was still touchy when Trenholme ventured to peep into the kitchen.

"I don't know how you dare show your face," she cried wrathfully. "The impidence of men nowadays! Just fancy you comin' an' openin' my door!"

"But, *chérie*, what have I done?" he inquired, his brown eyes wide with astonishment.

"I'm not your cherry, nor your peach, neither. Who put that clock in my room?"

"What clock, *ma belle?*"

Eliza picked up an egg, and bent so fiery a glance on the intruder that he dodged out of sight for a second.

"Listen, *carissima*," he pleaded, peering round the jamb of the door again. "If the alarm found its way upstairs I must have been walking in my sleep. While you were dreaming of suffragettes I may have been dreaming of you."

"Stop there a bit longer, chatterin' and callin' me names, an' your bacon will be frizzled to a cinder," she retorted.

"I really hoped to save you some trouble by carrying in the breakfast tray myself. I hate to see a jolly, good-tempered woman of your splendid physique working yourself to a shadow."

ELIZA squared her elbows as a preliminary to another outburst, when the stairs creaked. Mary, the "help," was arriving hurriedly, in curl papers.

"Oh, *you*'ve condescended to get up, have you?" was the greeting Mary received.

"Why, it's on'y ten minutes to six!" cried the astonished girl, gazing at a grandfather's clock as if it were bewitched.

"You've never had such a shock since you were born," went on the sarcastic Eliza. "But don't thank *me*, my girl. Thank Mr. Trenholme, the gentleman stannin' there grinnin' like a Cheshire cat. Talk to him nicely, an' p'raps he'll paint your picter, an' then your special butcher boy will see how beautiful you reelly are."

"Jim don't need tellin' anything about that," said the girl, smiling, for Eliza's

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bark was notoriously worse than her bite.

"Jim!" came the snorting comment. "The first man who ever axed me to marry him was called Jim, an' when, like a wise woman, I said 'No,' he went away an' 'listed in the Royal Artillery an' lost his leg in a war—that's what Jim did."

"What a piece of luck you didn't accept him!" put in Trenholme.

"An' why, I'd like to know?"

"Because he began by losing his head over you. If a leg was missing, too, there wasn't much of Jim left, was there?"

Mary giggled, and Eliza seized the egg again; so Trenholme ran to his sitting-room. Within half an hour he was passing through the High Street, bidding an affable "Good morning" to such early risers as he met, and evidently well content with himself and the world in general. His artist's kit revealed his profession even to the uncritical eye, but no student of men could have failed to guess his bent were he habited in the garb of a costermonger. The painter and the poet are the last of the Bohemians, and John Trenholme was a Bohemian to the tips of his fingers.

He carried himself like a cavalier, but the divine flame of art kindled in his eye. He had learned how to paint in Julien's studio, and that same school had taught him to despise convention. He looked on nature as a series of exquisite pictures, and regarded men and women in the mass as creatures that occasionally fitted into the landscape. He was heart whole and fancy free. At twenty-five he had already exhibited three times in the Salon, and was spoken of by the critics as a painter of much promise, which is the critical method of waiting to see how the cat jumps when an artist of genius and originality arrests attention.

He had peculiarly luminous brown eyes set well apart in a face which won the prompt confidence of women, children and dogs. He was splendidly built for an outdoor life, and moved with a long, supple stride, a gait which people mistook for lounging until they walked with him, and found that the pace was something over four miles an hour. Add to these personal traits the fact that he had dwelt in Roxton exactly two days and a half, and was already on speaking terms with most of the inhabitants, and you have a fair notion of John Trenholme's appearance and ways.

There remains but to add that he was commissioned by a magazine to visit this old-world Hertfordshire village and depict some of its beauties before a projected railway introduced the jerry-builder and a sewerage scheme, and his presence in the White Horse Inn is explained. He had sketched the straggling High Street, the green, the inn itself, boasting a license six hundred years old, the undulating common, the church with its lich gate, the ivy-clad ruin known as "The Castle," with its square Norman keep still frowning at an English countryside, and there remained but an Elizabethan mansion, curiously misnamed "The Towers," to be transferred to his portfolio. Here, oddly enough, he had been rebuffed. A note to the owner, Mortimer Fenley, banker and super City man, asking permission to enter the park for an afternoon, had met with a curt refusal.

Trenholme, of course, was surprised, since he was paying the man a rare compliment; he had expressed in the inn his full and free opinion concerning all money grubbers, and the Fenley species thereof in particular; whereupon the stout Eliza, who classed the Fenley family as "rubbish," informed him that there was a right of way through the park, and that from a certain point near a lake he could sketch the grand old manor house to his heart's content, let the Fenleys and their keepers scowl as they chose.

The village barber, too, bore out Eliza's statement.

"A rare old row there was in Roxton twenty year ago, when Fenley fust kem here, an' tried to close the path," said the barber. "But we beat him, we did, an' well he knows it. Not many folk use it nowadays, 'coss the artful ole dodger opened a new road to the station; but some of us makes a point of strollin' that way on a Sunday afternoon, just to look at the pheasants an' rabbits, an' it's a treat to see the head keeper's face when we go through the lodge gates at the Easton end, for that is the line the path takes."

Here followed a detailed description, for the Roxton barber, like every other barber, could chatter like a magpie; it was in such wise that Trenholme was able to defy the laws forbidding trespass, and score off the seemingly uncivil owner of a historical dwelling.

He little imagined, that glorious June morning, that he was entering on a road of

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strange adventure. He had chosen an early hour purposely. Not only were the lights and shadows perfect for water color, but it was highly probable that he would be able to come and go without attracting attention. He had no wish to annoy Fenley, or quarrel with the man's myrmidons. Indeed, he would not have visited the estate at all if the magazine editor had not specially stipulated for a full-page drawing of the house.

Now, all would have been well had the barber's directions proved as bald in spirit as they were in letter.

"After passin' 'The Waggoner's Rest,' you'll come to a pair of iron gates on the right," he had said. "On one side there's a swing gate. Go through, an' make straight for a clump of cedars on top of a little hill. There mayn't be much of a path, but that's it. It's reelly a short cut to the Easton gate on the London road."

Yet who could guess what a snare for an artist's feet lay in those few words? How could Trenholme realize that "a pair of iron gates" would prove to be an almost perfect example of Christopher Wren's genius as a designer of wrought iron? Trenholme's eyes sparkled when he beheld this prize, with its acanthus leaves and roses beaten out with wonderful freedom and beauty of curve. A careful drawing was the result. Another result, uncounted by him, but of singular importance in its outcome, was the delay of forty minutes thus entailed.

HE CROSSED an undulating park and had no difficulty in tracing an almost disused path in certain grass-grown furrows leading past the group of cedars. On reaching this point he obtained a fair view of the mansion; but the sun was directly behind him, as the house faced southeast, and he decided to encroach some few yards on private property. A brier-laden slope fell from the other side of the trees to a delightful-looking lake fed by a tiny cascade on the east side. An ideal spot, he thought.

This, then, was the stage setting: Trenholme, screened by black cedars and luxuriant brushwood, was seated about fifty feet above the level of the lake and some forty yards from its nearest sedges. The lake itself, largely artificial, lay at the foot of the waterfall, which gurgled and splashed down a miniature precipice of moss-covered boulders. Here and there a rock, a copper beech, a silver larch, or a few flowering shrubs cast strong shadows on the dark, pellucid mirror beneath. On a cunningly contrived promontory of brown rock stood a white marble statue of Venus Aphrodite, and the ripples from the cascade seemed to endow with life the shimmering reflection of the goddess.

Beyond the lake a smooth lawn, dotted with fine old oaks and chestnuts, rose gently for a quarter of a mile to the Italian gardens in front of the house. To the left, the park was bounded by woods. To the right was another wood, partly concealing a series of ravines and disused quarries. Altogether a charming setting for an Elizabethan manor, pastoral, peaceful, quite English, and seeming on that placid June morning so remote from the crowded mart that it was hard to believe the nearest milestone, with its "London, 30 miles."

Had Trenholme glanced at his watch he would have discovered that the hour was now half past seven, or nearly an hour later than he had planned. But Art, which is long-lived, recks little of Time, an evanescent thing. He was enthusiastic over his subject. He would make not one sketch, but two. That lake, like the gates, was worthy of immortality. Of course, the house must come first. He unpacked a canvas hold-all, and soon was busy.

He worked with the speed and assured confidence of a master. By years of patient industry he had wrested from Nature the secrets of her tints and tone values. Quickly there grew into being an exquisitely bright and well balanced drawing, impressionist, but true; a harmony of color and atmosphere. Leaving subtleties to the quiet thought of the studio, he turned to the lake. Here the lights and shadows were bolder. They demanded the accurate appraisement of the half closed eye. He was so absorbed in his task that he was blithely unconscious of the approach of a girl from the house, and his first glimpse of her was forthcoming when she crossed the last spread of velvet sward which separated a cluster of rhododendrons in the middle distance from the farther edge of the lake.

It was not altogether surprising that he had not seen her earlier. She wore a green coat and skirt and a most curiously shaped hat of the same hue, so that her colors blended with the landscape. Moreover, she was walking rapidly, and had covered the intervening quarter of a mile in four minutes or less.

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He thought at first that she was heading straight for his lofty perch, and was perhaps bent on questioning his right to be there at all. But he was promptly undeceived. Her mind was set on one object, and her eyes did not travel beyond it. She no more suspected that an artist was lurking in the shade of the cedars than she did that the man in the moon was gazing blandly at her above their close-packed foliage. She came on with rapid, graceful strides, stood for a moment by the side of the Venus, and then, while Trenholme literally gasped for breath, shed coat, skirt and shoes, revealing a slim form clad in a dark blue bathing costume, and dived into the lake.

Trenholme had never felt more surprised. The change of costume was so unexpected, the girl's complete ignorance of his presence was so obvious that he regarded himself as a confessed intruder, somewhat akin to Peeping Tom of Coventry. He was utterly at a loss how to act. If he stood up and essayed a hurried retreat, the girl might probably be frightened, and would unquestionably be annoyed. It was impossible to creep away unseen. He was well below the crest of the slope crowned by the trees, and the nymph now disporting in the lake could hardly fail to discover him, no matter how deftly he crouched and twisted.

At this crisis, the artistic instinct triumphed. He became aware that the one element lacking hitherto, the element that lent magic to the beauty of the lake and its vivid environment of color, was the touch of life brought by the swimmer. He caught the flash of her limbs as they moved rhythmically through the dark, clear water, and it seemed almost as if the gods had striven to be kind in sending this naiad to complete a perfect setting. With stealthy hands he drew forth a small canvas. Oil, not mild water color, was the fitting medium to portray this Eden. Shrinking back under cover of a leafy brier, he began a third sketch in which the dominant note was the contrast between the living woman and the marble Venus.

For fifteen minutes the girl disported herself like a dolphin. Evidently she was a practised swimmer, and had at her command all the resources of the art. At last she climbed out, and stood dripping on the sun-laved rock beside the statue. Trenholme had foreseen this attitude—had, in fact, painted with feverish energy in anticipation of it. The comparison was too striking to be missed by an artist. Were it not for the tightly clinging garments, the pair would have provided a charming representation of Galatea in stone and Galatea after Pygmalion's frenzy had warmed her into life.

Trenholme was absolutely deaf now to any consideration save that of artistic endeavor. With a swift accuracy that was nearly marvelous he put on the canvas the sheen of faultless limbs and slender neck. He even secured the spun-gold glint of hair tightly coifed under a bathing cap—a species of head-dress which had puzzled him at the first glance—and there was more than a suggestion of a veritable portrait of the regular, lively, and delicately beautiful features which belonged to a type differing in every essential from the cold, classic loveliness of the statue, and yet were even more appealing in their sheer femininity.

THEN the spell was broken. The girl slipped on her shoes, dressed herself in a few seconds, and was hurrying back to the house, almost before Trenholme dared to breathe normally.

"Well," he muttered, watching the swaying of the green skirt as its owner traversed the park, "this is something like an adventure! By Jove, I've been lucky this morning! I've got my picture for next year's Salon!"

He had got far more, if only he were gifted to peer into the future; but that is a privilege denied to men, even to artists. Soon, when he was calmer, and the embryo sketch had assumed its requisite color notes for subsequent elaboration, he smiled a trifle dubiously.

"If that girl's temperament is as attractive as her looks I'd throw over the Salon for the sake of meeting her," he mused. "But that's frankly impossible, I suppose. At the best, she would not forgive me if she knew I had watched her in this thievish way. I could never explain it, never! She wouldn't even listen. Well, it's better to have dreamed and lost than never to have dreamed at all."

And yet he dreamed. His eyes followed the fair unknown while she entered the garden through a gateway of dense yews, and sped lightly up the steps of a terrace adorned with other statues in marble and bronze. No doorway broke the pleasing uniformity of the south front, but she disappeared

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through an open window, swinging herself lightly over the low sill. He went with her in imagination. Now she was crossing a pretty drawing-room, now running upstairs to her room, now dressing, possibly in white muslin, which, if Trenholme had the choosing of it, would be powdered with tiny *fleurs de lys*, now arranging her hair with keen eye for effect, and now tripping down again in obedience to a gong summoning the household to breakfast.

He sighed.

"If I had the luck of a decent French poodle, this plutocrat Fenley would eke have invited me to lunch," he grumbled.

Then his eyes sought the sketch, and he forgot the girl in her counterfeit. By Jove, this *would* be a picture! "The Nymphs of the Lake!" But he must change the composition a little—losing none of its character; only altering its accessories to such an extent that none would recognize the exact setting.

"Luck!" he chortled, with mercurial rise of spirits. "I'm the luckiest dog in England today. Happy chance has beaten all the tricks of the studio. O ye goddesses, inspire me to heights worthy of you!"

His visions were rudely dispelled by a gunshot, sharp, insistent, a tocsin of death in that sylvan solitude. A host of rooks arose from some tall elms near the house; a couple of cock pheasants flew with startled chucking out of the wood on the right; the white tails of rabbits previously unseen revealed their owners' whereabouts as they scampered to cover. But Trenholme was sportsman enough to realize that the weapon fired was a rifle; no toy, but of high velocity, and he wondered how any one dared risk its dangerous use in such a locality. He fixed the sound definitely as coming from the wood to the right—the cover quitted so hurriedly by the pheasants—and instinctively his glance turned to the house, in the half formed thought that some one there might hear the shot, and look out.

The ground floor window by which the girl had entered still remained open, but now another window, the most easterly one on the first floor, had been raised slightly. The light was peculiarly strong and the air so clear that even at the distance he fancied he could distinguish some one gesticulating, or so it seemed, behind the glass. This went on for a minute or more. Then the window was closed. At the same time he noticed a sparkling of glass and brasswork behind the clipped yew hedge which extended beyond the east wing. After some puzzling, he made out that a motor car was waiting there.

That was all. The clamor of the rooks soon subsided. A couple of rabbits skipped from the bushes to resume an interrupted meal on tender grass shoots. A robin trilled a roundelay from some neighboring branch. Trenholme looked at his watch. Half past nine! Why, he must have been mooning there a good half hour!

He gathered his traps, and as the result of seeing the automobile, which had not moved yet, determined to forego his earlier project of walking out of the park by the Easton gate.

He had just emerged from the trees when a gruff voice hailed him.

"Hi!" it cried. "Who're you, an' what are you doin' here?"

A man, carrying a shotgun and accompanied by a dog, strode up with determined air.

Trenholme explained civilly, since the keeper was clearly within his rights. Moreover, the stranger was so patently a gentleman that Velveteens adopted a less imperative tone.

"Did you hear a shot fired somewhere?" he asked.

"Yes. Among those trees." And Trenholme pointed. "It was a rifle, too," he added, with an eye at the twelve-bore.

"So *I* thought," agreed the keeper.

"Rather risky, isn't it, firing bullets in a place like this?"

"I just want to find out who the ijiot is that did it. Excuse me, sir, I must be off." And man and dog hurried away.

And Trenholme, not knowing that death had answered the shot, took his own departure, singing as he walked, his thoughts altogether on life, and more especially on life as revealed by the limbs of a girl gleaming in the dark waters of a pool.

CHAPTER II

"WHO HATH DONE THIS THING?"

TRENHOLME'S baritone was strong and tuneful—for the Muses, if kind, are often lavish of their gifts—so the final refrain of an impassioned love song traveled

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far that placid morning. Thus, when he reached the iron gates, he found the Roxton policeman standing there, grinning.

"Hello!" said the artist cheerily. Of course he knew the policeman. In a week he would have known every man and dog in the village by name.

"Good mornin', sir," said the Law, which was nibbling its chin strap and had both thumbs stuck in its belt. "That's a fine thing you was singin'. May I arsk wot it was? I do a bit in that line meself."

"It's the *cantabile* from Saint-Saëns' *Samson et Dalila*," replied Trenholme.

"Is it now? An' wot may that be, sir?"

The policeman's humor was infectious. Trenholme laughed, too. Realizing that the words and accent of Paris had no great vogue in Hertfordshire, he explained, and added that he possessed a copy of the song, which was at the service of the force. The man thanked him warmly, and promised to call at the inn during the afternoon.

"By the way, sir," he added, when Trenholme had passed through the wicket, "did you hear a shot fired while you was in the park?"

"Yes."

"Did you see anybody?"

"A keeper, who seemed rather annoyed about the shooting. Some one had fired a rifle."

"It sounded like that to me, sir, and it's an unusual thing at this time of the year."

"A heavy-caliber rifle must sound unusual at any time of the year in an enclosed estate near London," commented Trenholme.

"My idee exactly," said the policeman. "I think I'll go that way. I may meet Bates."

"If Bates is a bandy-legged person with suspicious eyes, a red tie, many pockets, brown leggings, and a yellow dog, you'll find him searching the wood beyond the lake, which is the direction the shot came from."

The policeman laughed.

"That's Bates, to a tick," he said. "If he was 'wanted,' your description would do for the *Police Gazette*."

They parted. Since Trenholme's subsequent history is bound up more closely with the policeman's movements during the next hour than with his own unhindered return to the White Horse Inn, it is well to trace the exact course of events as they presented themselves to the ken of a music-loving member of the Hertfordshire constabulary.

Police Constable Farrow did not hurry. Why should he? A gunshot in a gentleman's park at half past nine on a June morning might be, as he had put it, "unusual," but it was obviously a matter capable of the simplest explanation. Now such a sound heard at midnight would be sinister, ominous, replete with those elements of mystery and dread which cause even a policeman's heart to beat faster than the regulation pace. Under the conditions, when he met Bates, he would probably be told that Jenkins, under keeper and Territorial lance corporal, had resolved to end the vicious career of a hoodie, and had not scrupled to reach the wily robber with a bullet.

So Police Constable Farrow took fifteen minutes to cover the ground which Trenholme's longer stride had traversed in ten. Allow another fifteen for the artist's packing of his sketching materials, his conversation with gamekeeper and policeman, and the leisurely progress of the latter through the wood, and it will be found that Farrow reached the long straight avenue leading from the lodge at Easton to the main entrance of the house about forty minutes after the firing of the shot.

HE HALTED on the grass by the side of the well kept drive, and looked at the waiting motor car. The chauffeur was not visible. He had seen neither Bates nor Jenkins. His passing among the trees had not disturbed even a pheasant, though the estate was alive with game. The door of The Towers was open, but no stately manservant was stationed there. A yellow dog sat in the sunshine. Farrow and the dog exchanged long-range glances: the policeman consulted his watch, bit his chin strap, and dug his thumbs into his belt.

"Mr. Fenley is late today," he said to himself. "He catches the nine forty-five. As a rule, he's as reliable as Greenwich. I'll wait here till he passes, an' then call round an' see Smith."

Now Smith was the head gardener; evidently Police Constable Farrow was not only well acquainted with the various inmates of the mansion, but could have prepared a list of the outdoor employees as

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well. He stood there, calm and impassive as Fate, and, without knowing it, represented Fate in her most inexorable mood; for had he betaken himself elsewhere, the shrewdest brains of Scotland Yard might have been defeated by the enigma they were asked to solve before Mortimer Fenley's murderer was discovered.

Indeed, it is reasonable to suppose that if chance had not brought the village constable to that identical spot, and at that very hour, the precise method of the crime might never have been revealed. Moreover, Farrow himself may climb slowly to an inspectorship, and pass into the dignified ease of a pension, without being aware of the part he played in a tragedy that morning. Of course, in his own estimation, he filled a highly important rôle as soon as the hue and cry began, but a great deal of water would flow under London Bridge before the true effect of his walk through the wood and emergence into sight in the avenue began to dawn on other minds.

His appearance there was a vital fact. It changed the trend of circumstances much as the path of a comet is deflected by encountering a heavy planet. Presumably, neither comet nor planet is aware of the disturbance. That deduction is left to the brooding eye of science.

Be that as it may, Police Constable Farrow's serenity was not disturbed until a doctor's motor car panted along the avenue from Easton and pulled up with a jerk in front of him. The doctor, frowning with anxiety, looked out, and recognition was mutual.

"Have you got the man?" he asked, and the words were jerked out rather than spoken.

"What man, sir?" inquired Farrow, saluting.

"The man who shot Mr. Fenley."

"The man who shot Mr. Fenley!" Farrow could only repeat each word in a crescendo of amazement. Being a singer, he understood the use of a crescendo, and gave full scope to it.

"Good Heavens!" cried the doctor. "Haven't you been told? Why are you here? Mr. Fenley was shot dead on his own doorstep nearly an hour ago. At least that is the message telephoned by his son. Unfortunately I was out. Right ahead, Tom!"

The chauffeur threw in the clutch, and the car darted on again. Farrow followed, a quite alert and horrified policeman now. But it was not ordained that he should enter the house. He was distant yet a hundred yards, or more, when three men came through the doorway. They were Bates, the keeper, Tomlinson, the butler, and Mr. Hilton Fenley, elder son of the man now reported dead. All were bareheaded. The arrival of the doctor, at that instant alighting from his car, prevented them from noticing Farrow's rapid approach. When Hilton Fenley saw the doctor he threw up his hands with the gesture of one who has plumbed the depths of misery. Farrow could, and did, fit in the accompanying words quite accurately.

"Nothing can be done, Stern! My father is dead!"

The two clasped each other's hand, and Hilton Fenley staggered slightly. He was overcome with emotion. The shock of a terrible crime had taxed his self-control to its uttermost bounds. He placed a hand over his eyes and said brokenly to the butler:

"You take Dr. Stern inside, Tomlinson. I'll join you in a few minutes. I must have a breath of air, or I'll choke!"

Doctor and butler hurried into the house; then, but not until then, Hilton Fenley and the keeper became aware of Farrow, now within a few yards. At sight of him, Fenley seemed to recover his faculties; the mere possibility of taking some definite action brought a tinge of color to a pallid and somewhat sallow face.

"Ah! Here is the constable," he cried. "Go with him, Bates, and have that artist fellow arrested!"

"Meaning Mr. Trenholme, sir?" inquired the policeman, startled anew by this unexpected reference to the man he had parted from so recently.

"I don't know his name; but Bates met him in the park, near the lake, just after the shot was fired that killed my father."

"But I met him, too, sir. He didn't fire any shot. He hadn't a gun. In fact, he spoke about the shootin', and was surprised at it."

"Look here, Farrow, I am incapable of thinking clearly; so you must act for the best. Some one fired that bullet. It nearly tore my father to pieces. I never saw anything like it. It was ghastly—oh, ghastly! The murderer must be found. Why are

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you losing time? Jump into the car, and Brodie will take you anywhere you want to go. The roads, the railway stations, must be scoured, searched. Oh, do something, or I shall go mad!"

Hilton Fenley did, indeed, wear the semblance of a man distraught. Horror stared from his deep-set eyes and lurked in the corners of his mouth. His father had been struck dead within a few seconds after they had separated in the entrance hall, both having quitted the breakfast room together, and the awful discovery which followed the cry of an alarmed servant had almost shaken the son's reason.

Farrow was hardly fitted to deal with a crisis of such magnitude, but he acted promptly and with fixed purpose—qualities which form the greater part of generalship.

"BATES," he said, turning a determined eye on the keeper, "where was you when you heard the shot?"

"In the kennels, back of the lodge," came the instant answer.

"And you kem this way at once?"

"Straight. Didn't lose 'arf a minute."

"So no one could have left by the Easton gate without meeting you?"

"That's right."

"And you found Mr. Trenholme—where?"

"Comin' away from the cedars, above the lake."

"What did he say?"

"Told me about the shot, an' pointed out the Quarry Wood as the place it kem from."

"Was he upset at all in his manner?"

"Not a bit. Spoke quite nateral-like."

"Well, between the three of us, you an' me an' Mr. Trenholme, we account for both gates an' the best part of two miles of park. Where is Jenkins?"

"I left him at the kennels."

"Ah!"

The policeman was momentarily nonplussed. He had formed a theory in which Jenkins, that young Territorial spark, figured either as a fool or a criminal.

"What's the use of holding a sort of inquiry on the doorstep?" broke in Hilton Fenley shrilly. His utterance was nearly hysterical. Farrow's judicial calm appeared to stir him to frenzy. He clamored for action, for zealous scouting, and this orderly investigation by mere words was absolutely maddening.

"I'm not wastin' time, sir," said Farrow respectfully. "It's as certain as anythink can be that the murderer, if murder has been done, has not got away by either of the gates."

"If murder has been done!" cried Fenley. "What do you mean? Go and look at my poor father's corpse——"

"Of course, Mr. Fenley is dead, sir, an' sorry I am to hear of it; but the affair may turn out to be an accident."

"Accident! Farrow, you're talking like an idiot. A man is shot dead at his own front door, in a house standing in the midst of a big estate, and you tell me it's an accident!"

"No, sir. I on'y mentioned that on the off chance. Queer things do happen, an' one shouldn't lose sight of that fact just because it's unusual. Now, sir, with your permission, I want Brodie, an' Smith, an' all the menservants you can spare for the next half hour."

"Why?"

"Brodie can motor to the Inspector's office, an' tell him wot he knows, stoppin' on the way to send Jenkins here. Some of us must search the woods thoroughly, while others watch the open park, to make sure no one escapes without bein' seen. It's my firm belief that the man who fired that rifle is still hidin' among those trees. He may be sneakin' off now, but we'd see him if we're quick in reachin' the other side. Will you do as I ask, sir?"

Farrow was already in motion when Fenley's dazed mind recalled something the policeman ought to know.

"I've telephoned to Scotland Yard half an hour ago," he said.

"That's all right, sir. The main thing now is to search every inch of the woods. If nothing else, we may find footprints."

"And make plenty of new ones."

"Not if the helpers do as I tell 'em, sir."

"I can't argue. I'm not fit for it. Still, some instinct warns me you are not adopting the best course. I think you ought to go in the car and put the police into combined action."

"What are they to do, sir? The murderer won't carry a rifle through the village, or along the open road. I fancy we'll come across the weapon itself in the wood. Besides, the Inspector will do all that is

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necessary when Brodie sees him. Reelly, sir, I *know* I'm right."

"But shouldn't that artist be questioned?"

"Of course he will, sir. He won't run away. If he does, we'll soon nab him. He's been stayin' at the White Horse Inn the last two days, an' is quite a nice-spoken young gentleman. Why should *he* want to shoot Mr. Fenley?"

"He is annoyed with my father, for one thing."

"Eh? Wot, sir?"

Farrow, hitherto eager to be off on the hunt, stopped as if he had heard a statement of real importance.

Hilton Fenley pressed a hand to his eyes.

"It was nothing to speak of," he muttered. "He wrote asking permission to sketch the house, and my father refused—just why I don't know; some business matter had vexed him that day, I fancy, and he dashed off the refusal on the spur of the moment. But a man does not commit a terrible crime for so slight a cause. . . . Oh, if only my head would cease throbbing! . . . Do as you like. Bates, see that every assistance is given."

Fenley walked a few paces unsteadily. Obviously he was incapable of lucid thought, and the mere effort at sustained conversation was a torture. He turned through a yew arch into the Italian garden, and threw himself wearied into a seat.

"Poor young fellow! He's fair off his nut," whispered Bates.

"What can one expect?" said Farrow. "But we must get busy. Where's Brodie? Do go an' find him."

Bates jerked a thumb toward the house.

"He's in there," he said. "He helped to carry in the guv'nor. Hasn't left him since."

"He must come at once. He can't do any good now, an' we've lost nearly an hour as it is."

The chauffeur appeared, red-eyed and white-faced. But he understood the urgency of his mission, and soon had the car in movement. Others came—the butler, some gardeners, and men engaged in stables and garage, for the dead banker maintained a large establishment. Farrow explained his plan. They would beat the woods methodically, and the searcher who noted anything "unusual"—the word was often on the policeman's lips—was not to touch or disturb the object or sign in any way, but its whereabouts should be marked by a broken branch stuck in the ground. Of course, if a stranger was seen, an alarm should be raised instantly.

The little party was making for the Quarry Wood, when Jenkins arrived on a bicycle. The first intimation he had received of the murder was the chauffeur's message. There was a telephone between house and lodge, but no one had thought of using it.

"NOW, Bates," said Farrow, when the squad of men had spread out in line, "you an' me will take the likeliest line. You ought to know every spot in the covert where it's possible to aim a gun at any one stannin' on top of the steps at The Towers. There can't be many such places. Is there even one? I don't suppose the barefaced scoundrel would dare come out into the open drive. Brodie said Mr. Fenley was shot through the right side while facin' the car, so he bears out both your notion an' Mr. Trenholme's that the bullet kem from the Quarry Wood. What's *your* idea about it? Have you one, or are you just as much in the dark as the rest of us?"

Bates was sour-faced with perplexity. The killing of his employer was already crystallizing in his thoughts into an irrevocable thing, for the butler had lifted aside the dead man's coat and waistcoat, and this had shown him the ghastly evidences of a wound which must have been instantly fatal. Now, a shrewd if narrow intelligence was concentrated on the one tremendous question, "Who hath done this thing?" He looked so worried that the yellow dog, watching him, and quick to interpret his moods, slouched warily at heel; and Farrow, though agog with excitement, saw that his crony was ill at ease because of some twinge of fear or suspicion.

"Speak out, Jim," he urged, dropping his voice to a confidential pitch, lest one of the others might overhear. "Give me the straight tip, if you can. It need never be known that it kem from you."

"I've a good berth here," muttered the keeper, with seeming irrelevance.

"Tell me something fresh," said Farrow, quickening with grateful memories of many a pheasant and brace of rabbits reposing a brief space in his modest larder.

"So, if I tell you things in confidence like——"

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"I've heard 'em from any one but you."

Bates drew a deep breath, only to expel it fiercely between puffed lips.

"It's this way," he growled. "Mr. Robert an' the ol' man didn't hit it off, an' there was a deuce of a row between 'em the other day, Saturday it was. My niece, Mary, was a-dustin' the banisters when the two kem out from breakfast, an' she heered the Gov'nor say: 'That's my last word on the subjec'. I mean to be obeyed this time.'

" 'But, look here, pater,' said Mr. Robert —he always calls his father pater, ye know —'I reelly can't arrange matters in that offhand way. You must give me time.' 'Not another minute,' said Mr. Fenley. 'Oh, dash it all,' said Mr. Robert, 'you're enough to drive a fellow crazy. At times I almost forget that I'm your son. Some fellows would be tempted to blow their brains out, an' yours, too.'

"At that, Tomlinson broke in, an' grabbed Mr. Robert's arm, an' the Gov'nor went off in the car in a fine ol' temper. Mr. Robert left The Towers on his motor bike soon afterward, an' he hasn't been back since."

Although the fount of information temporarily ran dry, Farrow felt that there was more to come if its secret springs were tapped.

"Did Mary drop a hint as to what the row was about?" he inquired.

"She guessed it had something to do with Miss Sylvia."

"Why Miss Sylvia?"

"She an' Mr. Robert are pretty good friends, you see."

"I see." The policeman saw little, but each scrap of news might fit into its place presently.

"Is that all?" he went on. They were nearing that part of the wood where care must be exercised, and he wanted Bates to talk while in the vein.

"No, not by a long way," burst out the keeper, seemingly unable to contain any longer the deadly knowledge weighing on his conscience. "Don't you try an' hold me to it, Farrow, or I'll swear black an' blue I never said it; but I knew the ring of the shot that killed my poor ol' guv'nor. It was fired from an express rifle, an' there's on'y one of the sort in Roxton, so far as *I've* ever seen. An' it is, or ought to be, in Mr. Robert's sittin'-room at this very minute. There! Now you've got it. Do as you like. Get Tomlinson to talk, or anybody else, but keep me out of it—d'ye hear?"

"I hear," said Farrow, thrilling with the consciousness that when some dandy detective arrived from the "Yard," he would receive an eye opener from a certain humble member of the Hertfordshire constabulary. Not that he quite brought himself to believe Robert Fenley his father's murderer. That was going rather far. That would, indeed, be a monstrous assumption as matters stood. But as clues the quarrel and the rifle were excellent, and Scotland Yard must recognize them in that light.

Certainly, this was an unusual case; most unusual. He was well aware of the reputation attached to Robert Fenley, the banker's younger son, who differed from his brother in every essential. Hilton was steady-going, business-like, his father's secretary and right hand in affairs, both in the bank and in matters affecting the estate. Robert, almost unmanageable as a youth, had grown into an exceedingly rapid young man about town. But Roxton folk feared Hilton and liked Robert; and local gossip had deplored Robert's wildness, which might erect an insurmountable barrier against an obviously suitable match between him and Mr. Mortimer Fenley's ward, the rich and beautiful Sylvia Manning.

These things were vivid in the policeman's mind, and he was wondering how the puzzle would explain itself in the long run, when an exclamation from Bates brought his vagrom speculations sharply back to the problem of the moment.

The keeper, of course, as Farrow had said, was making straight for the one place in the Quarry Wood which commanded a clear view of the entrance to the mansion. The two men were skirting the disused quarry, now a rabbit warren, which gave the locality its name; they followed the rising edge of the excavation, treading on a broad strip of turf, purposely freed of encroaching briers lest any wandering stranger might plunge headlong into the pit. Near the highest part of the rock wall there was a slight depression in the ground; and here, except during the height of a phenomenally dry Summer, the surface was always moist.

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BATES, who was leading, had halted suddenly. He pointed to three well marked footprints.

"Who's been here, an' not so long ago, neither?" he said, darting ferret eyes now at the telltale marks and now into the quarry beneath or through the solemn aisle of trees.

"Stick in some twigs, an' let's hurry on," said Farrow. "Footprints are first rate, but they'll keep for an hour or two."

Thirty yards away, and somewhat to the right, a hump of rock formed the Mont Blanc of that tiny Alp. From its summit, and from no other part of the wood, they could see the east front of The Towers. In fact, while perched there, having climbed its shoulder with great care lest certain definite tokens of a recent intruder should be obliterated, they discovered a dusty motor car ranged between the doctor's runabout and the Fenley limousine, which had returned.

The doctor and Miss Sylvia Manning were standing on the broad mosaic which adorned the landing above the steps, standing exactly where Mortimer Fenley had stood when he was stricken to death. With them were two strangers: one tall, burly, and official-looking; the other a shrunken little man, whose straw hat, short jacket, and clean-shaven face conveyed, at the distance, a curiously juvenile aspect.

Half way down the steps were Hilton Fenley and Brodie, and all were gazing fixedly at that part of the wood where the keeper and the policeman had popped into view.

"Hello!" said Bates. "Who is that little lot?"

Clearly, he meant the big man and his diminutive companion. Farrow coughed importantly.

"That's Scotland Yard," he said.

"Who?"

"Detectives from the Yard. Mr. Hilton telephoned for 'em. An' wot's more, they're signalin' to us."

"They want us to go back," said Bates.

"Mebbe."

"There can't be any doubt about it." And, indeed, only a blind man could have been skeptical as to the wishes of the group near the door.

"I'm goin' through this wood first," announced Farrow firmly. "Mind how you get down. Them marks may be useful. I'm almost sure the scoundrel fired from this very spot."

"Looks like it," agreed Bates, and they descended.

Five minutes later they were in the open park, where their assistant scouts awaited them. None of the others had found any indication of a stranger's presence, and Farrow led them to the house in Indian file, by a path.

"Scotland Yard is on the job," he announced. "Now we'll be told just wot we reelly ought to have done!"

He did not even exchange a furtive glance with Bates, but, for the life of him he could not restrain a note of triumph from creeping into his voice. He noticed, too, that Tomlinson, the butler, not only looked white and shaken, which was natural under the circumstances, but had the haggard aspect of a stout man who may soon become thin by stress of fearsome imaginings.

Farrow did not put it that way.

"Bates is right," he said to himself. "Tomlinson has somethink on his chest. By jingo, this affair *is* a one-er, an' no mistake!"

At any rate, local talent had no intention of kowtowing too deeply before the majesty of the "Yard," for the Chief of the Criminal Investigation Department himself could have achieved no more in the time than Police Constable Farrow.

CHAPTER III

THE HOUNDS

SUPERINTENDENT James Leander Winter, Chief of the Criminal Investigation Department at Scotland Yard, had just opened the morning's letters, and was virtuously resisting the placid charms of an open box of cigars, when the telephone bell rang. The speaker was the Assistant Commissioner.

"Leave everything else, and motor to Roxton," said the calm voice of authority. "Mr. Mortimer Fenley, a private banker in the City, was shot dead about nine thirty at his own front door. His place is The Towers, which stands in a park between the villages of Roxton and Easton, in Hertfordshire. His son, who has just telephoned here, believes that a rifle was fired from a neighboring wood, but several minutes elapsed before any one realized that the

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banker was shot, the first impression of the servants who ran to his assistance when he staggered and fell being that he was suffering from apoplexy. By the time the cause of death was discovered the murderer could have escaped, so no immediate search was organized. Mr. Hilton Fenley, a son, who spoke with difficulty, explained that he thought it best to 'phone here after summoning a doctor. The dead man is of some importance in the City, so I want you to take personal charge of the inquiry."

The voice ceased. Mr. Winter, while listening, had glanced at a clock.

"Nine thirty this morning, sir?" he inquired.

"Yes. The son lost no time. The affair happened a quarter of an hour ago."

"I'll start in five minutes."

"Good. By the way, who will go with you?"

"Mr. Furneaux."

"Excellent. I leave matters in your hands, Superintendent. Let me hear the facts if you return to town before six."

Evidently the Roxton murder was one of the year's big events. It loomed large already in the official mind. Winter called up various departments in quick succession, gave a series of orders, sorted his letters hastily, thrusting some into a drawer and others into a basket on the table, and was lighting a cigar when the door opened and his trusted aide, Detective Inspector Furneaux, entered.

"Ha!" cackled the newcomer; for Winter had confided to him, only the day before, certain reasons why the habit of smoking to excess was injurious, and his (Winter's) resolve to cut down the day's cigars to three, one after each principal meal.

"Circumstances alter cases," said the Superintendent blandly, scrutinizing the Havana to make sure that the outer leaf was burning evenly. "You and I are off for a jaunt in the country, Charles, and the sternest disciplinarian unbends during holiday time."

"Scotland Yard, as well as the other place, is paved with good intentions," said Furneaux.

Winter stooped, and took a couple of automatic pistols from a drawer in the desk at which he was seated.

"Put one of those in your pocket," he said.

Again did his colleague smile derisively.

"So it is only a 'bus driver's holiday?" he cried.

"One never knows. Some prominent banker, name of Fenley, has been shot. There may be more shooting."

"Fenley? Not Mortimer Fenley?"

"Yes. Do you know him?"

"Better than I know you; because you often puzzle me, whereas he struck me as a respectable swindler. Don't you remember those bonds which disappeared so mysteriously two months ago from the safe of the Mortgage and Discount Bank, and were all sold in Paris before the loss was discovered?"

"By Jove! Is that the Fenley?"

"None other. Of course, you were hobnobbing with royalty at the time, so such a trifle as the theft of ten thousand pounds' worth of negotiable securities didn't trouble you a bit. I see you're wearing the pin today."

"So would you wear it, if an Emperor deigned to take notice of such a shrimp."

"Shrimp you call me! Imagine a lobster sticking rubies and diamonds into a heliotrope tie!"

Winter winked solemnly.

"I picked up some wrinkles in color blends at the Futurist Exhibition," he said. "But here's Johnston to tell us the car is ready."

THE oddly assorted pair followed the constable in uniform, now hurrying ahead to ring for the elevator. The big, bluff, bullet-headed Superintendent was physically well fitted for his responsible position, though he combined with the official demeanor some of the easy-going characteristics of a country squire; but Charles François Furneaux was so unlike the detective of romance and the stage that he often found it difficult to persuade strangers that he was really the famous detective inspector they had heard of in connection with many a celebrated trial.

On the other hand, if one were told that he hailed from the Comédie Française, the legend would be accepted without demur. He had the clean-shaven, wrinkled face of the comedian; his black eyes sparkled with an active intelligence; an expressive mouth bespoke clear and fluent speech; his quick, alert movements were those of the mimetic actor. Winter stood six feet in height, and weighed two hundred and ten pounds;

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Furneaux was six inches shorter and eighty pounds lighter. The one was a typical John Bull, the other a Channel Islander of pure French descent, and never did more curiously assorted couple follow the trail of a criminal.

Yet, if noteworthy when acting apart, they were almost infallible in combination. More than one eminent scoundrel had either blown out his brains or given himself up to the law when he knew that the Big 'Un and Little 'Un of the Yard were hot on his track. Winter seldom failed to arrive at the only sound conclusion from ascertained facts, whereas Furneaux had an almost uncanny knowledge of the kinks and obliquities of the criminal mind. In the phraseology of logic, Winter applied the deductive method and Furneaux the inductive; when both fastened on to the same "suspect" the unlucky wight was in a parlous state.

It may be taken for granted, therefore, that the Assistant Commissioner knew what he was about in uttering his satisfaction at the Superintendent's choice of an assistant. Possibly he had the earlier bond robbery in mind, and expected now that another "mystery" would be solved. Scotland Yard guards many secrets which shirk the glare of publicity. Some may never be explained; but by far the larger proportion are cleared up unexpectedly by incidents which may occur months or years afterward, and whose connection with the original crime is indiscernible until some chance discovery lays bare the hidden clue.

One queer feature of the partnership between the two was their habit of chaffing and bickering at each other during the early stages of a joint hunt. They were like hounds giving tongue joyously when laid on the scent; dangerous then, they became mute and deadly when the quarry was in sight. In private life they were firm friends; officially, Furneaux was Winter's subordinate, but that fact neither silenced the Jersey man's sarcastic tongue nor stopped Winter from roasting his assistant unmercifully if an opportunity offered.

Their chauffeur took the line through the parks to the Edgeware Road, and they talked of anything save "shop" until the speed limit was off and the car was responding gaily to the accelerator. Then Winter threw away the last inch of a good cigar, involuntarily put his hand to a well filled case for its successor, sighed, and dropped his hand again.

"Force of habit," he said, finding Furneaux's eye on him.

"I didn't even think evil," was the reply.

"I really mustn't smoke so much," said Winter plaintively.

"Oh, for goodness' sake light up and be happy. If you sit there nursing your self-righteousness you'll be like a bear with a sore head before we pass Stanmore. Besides, consider me. I like the smell of tobacco, though my finer nervous system will not endure its use."

"Finer fiddlesticks," said Winter, cutting the end off a fresh Havana. "Now tell me about Fenley and the ten thousand. What's his other name? I forget—Alexander, is it?"

"No, nor Xenophon. Just Mortimer. He ran a private bank in Bishopsgate Street, and that, as you know, generally hides a company promoter. Frankly, I was bothered by Fenley at first. I believe he lost the bonds right enough, for he gave the numbers, and was horribly upset when it was found they had been sold in Paris. But, to my idea, he either stole them himself and was relieved of them later or was victimized by one of his sons.

"The only other person who could have taken them was the cashier, a hoary-headed old boy who resides at Epping, and has not changed his method of living since he first wore a silk hat and caught the eight-forty to the City one morning forty years ago. I followed him home on a Saturday afternoon. The bookstall clerk at Liverpool Street handed him *The Amateur Gardener*, and the old boy read it in the train. Five minutes after he had reached his house he was out on the lawn with a daisy fork. No; the cashier didn't arrange the Paris sale."

"What of the sons?"

"The elder, Hilton Fenley, is a neurotic, like myself, so he would shine with equal luster as a saint, or a detective, or a dyed-in-the-wool thief. The younger, Robert, ought to be an explorer, or a steeplechase jockey, or an airman. In reality, he is a first rate wastrel. In my distress I harked back to the old man, to whom the loss of the bonds represented something considerably less than a year's expenditure. He is mixed up in all sorts of enterprises—rubber, tea, picture palaces, breweries, and

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automobile finance. He lent fifty thousand pounds on five per cent. first mortgage bonds to one firm at Coventry, and half that amount to a rival show in West London. So he has the stuff, and plenty of it. Yet——"

Winter nodded.

"I KNOW the sort of man. Dealing in millions today; tomorrow in the dock at the Old Bailey."

"The point is that Fenley has never dealt in millions, and has kept his head high for twenty years. Just twenty years, by the way. Before that he was unknown. He began by the amalgamation of some tea plantations in Assam. Fine word, 'amalgamation.' It means money, all the time. Can't we amalgamate something, or somebody?"

"In Fenley's case it led to assassination."

"Perhaps. I have a feeling in my bones that if I knew who touched the proceeds of those bonds I might understand why some one shot Fenley this morning."

"I'll soon tell you a trivial thing like that," said Winter, affecting a close interest in the landscape.

"I shouldn't be at all surprised if you did," said Furneaux. "You have the luck of a Carnegie. Look at the way you bungled that affair of Lady Morris's diamonds, until you happened to see her maid meeting Gentleman George at the White City."

Winter smoked complacently.

"Smartest thing I ever did," he chortled. "Fixed on the thief within half an hour, and never lost touch till I knew how she had worked the job."

"The Bow Street method."

"Why didn't you try something of the sort with regard to Fenley's bonds?"

"I couldn't be crude, even with a City financier. I put it gently that the money was in the family; he blinked at me like an owl, said that he would give thought to the suggestion, and shut down the inquiry by telephone before I reached the Yard from his office."

"Oh, he did, did he? It seems to me you've made a pretty good guess in associating the bonds and the murder. You've seen both sons, of course?"

"Yes, often."

"Are there other members of the family?"

"An invalid wife, never away from The Towers; and a young lady, Miss Sylvia Manning—a ward, and worth a pile. By the way, she's twenty. Mortimer Fenley, had he lived, was appointed her guardian and trustee till she reached twenty-one."

"Twenty!" mused Winter.

"Yes, twice ten," snapped Furneaux.

"And Fenley has cut a figure in the City for twenty years."

"I was sure your gray matter would be stimulated by its favorite poison."

"Charles, this should be an easy thing."

"I'm not so sure. Dead men tell no tales, and Fenley himself could probably supply many chapters of an exciting story. They will be missing. Look at the repeated failures of eminent authors to complete 'Edwin Drood.' How would they have fared if asked to produce the beginning?"

"Still, I'm glad you attended to those bonds. Who had charge of the Paris end?"

"Jacques Faure."

"Ah, a good man."

"Pretty fair, for a Frenchman."

Winter laughed.

"You born frog!" he cried. . . . "Hello, there's a Roxton sign post. Now let's compose our features. We are near The Towers."

The estate figured on the county map, so the chauffeur pulled up at the right gate. A woman came from the lodge to inquire their business, and admitted the car when told that its occupants had been summoned by Mr. Hilton Fenley.

"By the way," said Furneaux carelessly, "is Mr. Robert at home?"

"No, sir."

"When did he leave?"

"I'm sure I don't know, sir."

Mrs. Bates knew quite well, and Furneaux knew that she knew.

"The country domestic is the detective's aversion," he said as the car whirred into the avenue. "The lady of the lodge will be a sufficiently tough proposition if we try to drag information out of her, but the real tug of war will come when we tackle the family butler."

"Her husband is also the head keeper," said Winter.

"Name of Bates," added Furneaux.

"Oh, you've been here before, then?"

"No. While you were taking stock of the kennels generally, I was deciphering a printed label on a box of dog biscuit."

"I hardly feel that I've begun this inquiry yet," said Winter airily.

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"You'd better pull yourself together. The dead man's limousine is still waiting at the door, and the local doctor is in attendance."

"Walter J. Stern, M.D."

"Probably. That brass plate on the Georgian house in the center of the village positively glistened."

They were received by Hilton Fenley himself, all the available men servants having been transferred to the cohort organized and directed by Police Constable Farrow.

"Good morning, Mr. Furneaux," said Fenley. "I little thought, when last we met, that I should be compelled to seek your help so soon again, and under such dreadful circumstances."

Furneaux, whose face could display at will a Japanese liveliness of expression or become a mask of Indian gravity, surveyed the speaker with inscrutable eyes.

"This is Superintendent Winter, Chief of my Department," he said.

"The Assistant Commissioner told me to take charge of the inquiry without delay, sir," explained Winter. He glanced at his watch. "We have not been long on the road. It is only twenty minutes to eleven."

FENLEY led them through a spacious hall into a dining-room on the left. On an oak settee at the back of the hall the outline of a white sheet was eloquent of the grim object beneath. In the dining-room were an elderly man and a slim, white-faced girl. Had Trenholme been present he would have noted with interest that her dress was of white muslin dotted with tiny blue spots—not *fleurs de lys*, but rather resembling them.

"Dr. Stern, and Miss Sylvia Manning," said Fenley to the newcomers. Then he introduced the Scotland Yard men in turn. By this time the young head of the family had schooled himself to a degree of self-control. His sallow skin held a greenish pallor, and as if to satisfy some instinct that demanded movement he took an occasional slow stride across the parquet floor or brushed a hand wearily over his eyes. Otherwise he had mastered his voice, and spoke without the gasping pauses which had made distressful his words to Farrow.

"Ours is a sad errand, Mr. Fenley," began Winter, after a hasty glance at the table, which still bore the disordered array of breakfast. "But, if you feel equal to the task, you might tell us exactly what happened."

Fenley nodded.

"Of course, of course," he said quietly. "That is essential. "We three, my father, Miss Manning and myself, breakfasted together. The second gong goes every morning at eight forty-five, and we were fairly punctual today. My father and Sylvia, Miss Manning, came in together—they had been talking in the hall previously. I saw them entering the room as I came downstairs. During the meal we chatted about affairs in the East; that is, my father and I did, and Syl—Miss Manning—gave us some news of a church bazaar in which she is taking part.

"My father rose first and went to his room, to collect papers brought from the City overnight. I met him on the stairs, and he gave me some instructions about a prospectus. (Let me interpolate that I was going to Victoria by a later train, having an appointment at eleven o'clock with Lord Ventnor, chairman of a company we are bringing out.) I stood on the stairs, saying something, while my father crossed the hall and took his hat and gloves from Harris, the footman. As I passed along the gallery to my own room I saw him standing on the landing at the top of the steps.

"He was cutting the end off a cigar, and Harris was just behind him and a little to the left, striking a match. Every fine morning my father lighted a cigar there. In rain or high wind he would light up inside the house. By the way, my mother is an invalid, and dislikes the smell of tobacco, so unless we have guests we don't smoke indoors.

"Well, I had reached my room, a sitting-room adjoining my bedroom, when I heard a gunshot. Apparently it came from the Quarry Wood, and I was surprised, because there is no shooting at this season. A little later—some few seconds—I heard Sylvia scream. I did not rush out instantly to discover the cause. Young ladies sometimes scream at wasps and caterpillars. Then I heard Tomlinson say, 'Fetch Mr. Hilton at once,' and I ran into Harris, who blurted out, 'Mr. Fenley has been shot, sir.'

"After that, I scarcely know what I said or how I acted. I remember running downstairs, and finding my father lying outside

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the front door, with Sylvia supporting his head and Tomlinson and Brodie trying to lift him. I think—in fact, I am sure now from what Dr. Stern tells me—that my father was dead before I reached him. We all thought at first that he had yielded to some awfully sudden form of paralysis, but some one—Tomlinson, I believe—noticed a hole through the right side of his coat and waistcoat. Then Sylvia—oh, perhaps that is matterless——"

"Every incident, however slight, is of importance in a case of this sort," Winter encouraged him.

"Well, she said—what was it, exactly? Do you remember, Sylvia?"

"Certainly," said the girl, unhesitatingly. "I said that I thought I recognized the sound of Bob's .450. Why shouldn't I say it? Poor Bob didn't shoot his father."

Her voice, though singularly musical, had a tearful ring which became almost hysterical in the vehemence of the question and its disclaimer.

Fenley moved uneasily, and raised his right hand to his eyes, while the left grasped the back of a chair.

"Bob is my brother Robert, who is away from home at this moment," he said, and his tone deprecated the mere allusion to the rifle owned by the absentee. "I only mentioned Miss Manning's words to show how completely at a loss we all were to account for my father's wound. I helped Tomlinson and Brodie to carry him to the settee in the hall. Then we—Tomlinson, that is—opened his waistcoat and shirt. Tomlinson cut the shirt with a scissors, and we saw the wound. Dr. Stern says there are indications that an expanding bullet was used, so the injuries must have been something appalling. . . . Sylvia, don't you think——"

"I'll not faint, or make a scene, if that is what you are afraid of, Hilton," said the girl bravely.

"That is all, then, or nearly all," went on Fenley, in the same dreary, monotonous voice. "I telephoned to Dr. Stern, and to Scotland Yard, deeming it better to communicate with you than with the local police. But it seems that Bates, our head keeper, hurrying to investigate the cause of the shot, met some artist coming away from the other side of the wood. The Roxton police constable, too, met and spoke with the same man, who told both Bates and the policeman that he heard the shot fired. The policeman, Farrow, refused to arrest the artist, and is now searching the wood with a number of our men——"

"CAN'T they be stopped?" broke in Furneaux, speaking for the first time.

"Yes, of course," and Hilton Fenley became a trifle more animated. "I wanted Farrow to wait till you came, but he insisted—said the murderer might be hiding there."

"When did Farrow arrive?"

"Oh, more than half an hour after my father was shot. I forgot to mention that my mother knows nothing of the tragedy yet. That is why we did not carry my poor father's body upstairs. She might overhear the shuffling of feet, and ask the cause."

"One thing more, Mr. Fenley," said Winter, seeing that the other had made an end. "Have you the remotest reason to believe that any person harbored a grievance against your father such as might lead to the commission of a crime of this nature?"

"I've been torturing my mind with that problem since I realized that my father was dead, and I can say candidly that he had no enemies. Of course, in business, one interferes occasionally with other men's projects, but people in the City do not shoot successful opponents."

"No private feud? No dismissed servant, sent off because of theft or drunkenness?"

"Absolutely none, to my knowledge. The youngest man on the estate has been employed here five or six years."

"It is a very extraordinary crime, Mr. Fenley."

For answer, the other sank into a chair and buried his face in his hands.

"How can we get those clodhoppers out of the wood?" said Furneaux. His thin, high-pitched voice dispelled the tension, and Fenley dropped his hands.

"Bates is certain to make for a rock which commands a view of the house," he said. "Perhaps, if we go to the door, we may see them."

He arose with obvious effort, but walked steadily enough. Winter followed with the doctor, and inquired in an undertone—

"Are you sure about the soft-nosed bullet, doctor?"

"Quite," was the answer. "I was in the

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Tirah campaign, and saw hundreds of such wounds."

Furneaux, too, had something to say to Miss Manning.

"How were you seated during breakfast?" he asked.

She showed him. It was a large room. Two windows looked down the avenue, and three into the garden, with its background of timber and park. Mr. Mortimer Fenley could have commanded both views; his son sat with his back to the park; the girl had faced it.

"I need hardly put it to you, but you saw no one in or near the trees?" said Furneaux.

"Not a soul. I bathe in a little lake below those cedars every morning, and it is an estate order that the men do not go in that direction between eight and nine o'clock. Of course, a keeper might have passed at nine thirty, but it is most unlikely."

"Did you bathe this morning?"

"Yes, soon after eight."

"Did you see the artist of whom Mr. Fenley spoke?"

"No. This is the first I have heard of any artist. Bates must have mentioned him while I was with Dr. Stern."

WHEN Farrow arrived at the head of his legion he was just in time to salute his Inspector, who had cycled from Easton after receiving the news left by the chauffeur at the police station. Farrow was bursting with impatience to reveal the discoveries he had made, though resolved to keep locked in his own breast the secret confided by Bates. He was thoroughly nonplussed, therefore, when Winter, after listening in silence to the account of the footprints and scratches on the moss-covered surface of the rock, turned to Hilton Fenley.

"With reference to the rifle which has been mentioned—where is it kept?" he said.

"In my brother's room. He bought it nearly a year ago, when he was planning an expedition to Somaliland."

"May I see it?"

Fenley signed to the butler, who was standing with the others at a little distance.

"You know the .450 Express which is in the gun rack in Mr. Robert's den?" he said. "Bring it to the Superintendent."

Tomlinson, shaken but dignified, and rather purple of face as the result of the tramp through the trees, went indoors. Soon he came back, and the rich tint had faded again from his complexion.

"Sorry, sir," he said huskily, "but the rifle is not there."

"Not there!"

It was Sylvia Manning who spoke; the others received this sinister fact in silence.

"No, miss."

"Are you quite sure?" asked Fenley.

"It is not in the gun rack, sir, nor in any of the corners."

There was a pause. Fenley clearly forced the next words.

"That's all right. Bates may have it in the gun room. We'll ask him. Or Mr. Robert may have taken it to the makers. I remember now he spoke of having the sight fitted with some new appliance."

He called Bates. No, the missing rifle was not in the gun room. Somehow the notion was forming in certain minds that it could not be there. Indeed, the keeper's confusion was so marked that Furneaux's glance dwelt on him for a contemplative second.

CHAPTER IV

BREAKING COVER

WINTER drew the local Inspector aside.

"This inquiry rests with you in the first instance," he said. "Mr. Furneaux and I are here only to assist. Mr. Fenley telephoned to the Commissioner, mainly because Scotland Yard was called in to investigate a bond robbery which took place in the Fenley Bank some two months ago. Probably you never heard of it. Will you kindly explain our position to your Chief Constable? Of course, we shall work with you and through you, but my colleague has reason to believe that the theft of the bonds may have some bearing on this murder, and, as the securities were disposed of in Paris, it is more than likely that the Yard may be helpful."

"I fully understand, sir," said the Inspector, secretly delighted at the prospect of joining in the hunt with two such renowned detectives. The combined parishes of Easton and Roxton seldom produced a crime of greater magnitude than the theft of a duck. The arrest of a burglar who broke into a villa, found a decanter of

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whisky, and got so hopelessly drunk that he woke up in a cell at the police station, was an event of such magnitude that its memory was still lively, though the leading personage was now out on ticket of leave after serving five years in various penal settlements.

"You will prepare and give the formal evidence at the inquest, which will be opened tomorrow," went on Winter. "All that is really necessary is identification and a brief statement by the doctor. Then the coroner will issue the burial certificate, and the inquiry should be adjourned for a fortnight. I would recommend discretion in choosing a jury. Avoid busybodies like the plague. Summon only sensible men, who will do as they are told and ask no questions."

"Exactly," said the Inspector; he found Machiavellian art in these simple instructions. How it broadened the horizon to be brought in touch with London!

Winter turned to look for Furneaux. The little man was standing where Mortimer Fenley had stood in the last moment of his life. His eyes were fixed on the wood. He seemed to be dreaming, but his friend well knew how much of clarity and almost supernatural vision was associated with Furneaux's dreams.

"Charles!" said the Superintendent softly.

Furneaux awoke, and ran down the steps. In his straw hat and light Summer suit he looked absurdly boyish, but the Inspector, who had formed an erroneous first impression, was positively startled when he met those blazing black eyes.

"Mr. Fenley should warn all his servants to speak fully and candidly," said Winter. "Then we shall question the witnesses separately. What do you think? Shall we start now?"

"First, the boots. We want a worn pair of boots belonging to each person in the house and employed on the estate, men and women, no exceptions, including the dead man's. Then we'll visit that wood. After that, the inquiry."

Winter nodded. When Furneaux and he were in pursuit of a criminal they dropped all nice distinctions of rank. If one made a suggestion the other adopted it without comment unless he could urge some convincing argument against it.

"Mr. Fenley should give his orders now," added Furneaux.

Winter explained his wishes to the nominal head of the household, and Fenley's compliance was ready and explicit.

"These gentlemen from Scotland Yard are acting in behalf of Mrs. Fenley, my brother and myself," he said to the assembled servants. "You must obey them as you would obey me. I place matters unreservedly in their hands."

"And our questions should be answered without reserve," put in Winter.

"Yes, of course. I implied that. At any rate, it is clear now."

"Brodie," said Furneaux, seeming to pounce on the chauffeur, "you were seated at the wheel when the shot was fired?"

"Ye—yes, sir," stuttered Brodie, rather taken aback by the little man's suddenness.

"Were you looking at the wood?"

"In a sort of a way, sir."

"Did you see any one among the trees?"

"No, sir, that I didn't." This more confidently.

"Place your car where it was stationed then. Take your seat, and try to imagine that you are waiting for your master. Start the engine, and behave exactly as though you expected him to enter the car. Don't watch the wood. I mean that you are not to avoid looking at it, but just throw yourself back to the condition of mind you were in at nine twenty-five this morning. Can you manage that?"

"I think so, sir."

"No chatting with others, you know. Fancy you are about to take Mr. Fenley to the station. If you should happen to see me, wave your hand. Then you can get down and stop the engine. You understand you are not to keep a sharp lookout for me?"

"Yes, sir."

THE butler thought it would take a quarter of an hour to collect sample pairs of boots from the house and outlying cottages. Police Constable Farrow was instructed to bring the butler and the array of boots to the place where the footprints were found, and Bates led the detectives and the inspector thither at once.

Soon the four men were gazing at the telltale marks, and the Inspector, of course, was ready with a shrewd comment.

"Whoever it was that came this way, he didn't take much trouble to hide his tracks," he said.

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The Scotland Yard experts were so obviously impressed that the Inspector tried a higher flight.

"They're a man's boots," he continued. "We needn't have worried Tomlinson to gather the maids' footgear."

Furneaux left two neat imprints in the damp soil.

"Bet you a penny whistle there are at least two women in The Towers who will make bigger blobs than these," he said.

A penny whistle, as a wager, is what Police Constable Farrow would term "unusual."

"Quite so," said the Inspector thoughtfully.

Winter caught Furneaux's eye, and frowned. There was nothing to be gained by taking a rise out of the local constabulary. Still, he gave one sharp glance at both sets of footprints. Then he looked at Furneaux again, this time with a smile.

The party passed on to the rock on the higher ground. Bates pointed out the old scratches, and those made by Farrow and himself.

"Me first!" cried Furneaux, darting nimbly to the summit. He was not there a second before he signaled to some one invisible from beneath. Winter joined him, and the east front of the house burst into view. Brodie was in the act of descending from the car. The doctor had gone. A small group of men were gazing at the wood, but Hilton Fenley and Sylvia Manning were not to be seen.

Neither man uttered a word. They looked at the rock under their feet, at the surrounding trees, oak and ash, elm and larch, all of mature growth, and towering thirty to forty feet above their heads, while the rock itself rose some twelve feet from the general level of the sloping ground.

Bates was watching them.

"The fact is, gentlemen, that if an oak an' a couple o' spruce firs hadn't been cut down you wouldn't see the house even from where you are," he said. "Mr. Fenley had an idea of buildin' a shelter on this rock, but he let it alone 'coss o' the birds. Ladies would be comin' here, an' a-disturbin' of 'em."

The detectives came down. Furneaux, meaning to put the Inspector in the right frame of mind, said confidentially—

"Brodie saw me instantly."

"Did he, now? It follows that he would have seen any one who fired at Mr. Fenley from that spot."

"It almost follows. We must guard against assuming a chance as a certainty."

"Oh, yes."

"And we must also try to avoid fitting facts into preconceived notions. Now, while the butler is gathering old boots, let us spend a few profitable minutes in this locality."

After that, any trace of soreness in the inspectorial breast was completely obliterated.

Both Winter and Furneaux produced strong magnifying-glasses, and scrutinized the scratches and impressions on the bare rock and moss. Bates, skilled in wood lore, was quick to note what they had discerned at a glance.

"Beg pardon, gentlemen both, but may I put in a word?" he muttered awkwardly.

"As many as you like," Winter assured him.

"Well, these here marks was made by Farrow an' meself, say about ten forty, or a trifle over an hour after the murder; an' I have no sort o' doubt as these other marks are a day or two days older."

"You might even put it at three days," agreed Winter.

"Then it follows——" began the Inspector, but checked himself. He was becoming slightly mixed as to the exact sequence of events.

"Come, now, Bates," said Furneaux, "you can tell us the day Mr. Robert Fenley left home recently? There is no harm in mentioning his name. It can't help being in our thoughts, since it was discovered that his gun was missing."

"He went off on a motor bicycle last Saturday mornin', sir."

"Can you fix the hour?"

"About half past ten."

"You have not seen him since?"

"No, sir."

"You would be likely to know if he had returned?"

"Certain, sir, unless he kem by the Roxton gate."

"Oh, is there another entrance?"

"Yes, but it can't be used, 'cept by people on foot. The big gates are always locked, and the road has been grassed over, an' not so many folk know of a right of way. Of course, Mr. Robert knows."

Bates was disturbed. He expected to be

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cross-examined farther, but, to his manifest relief, the ordeal was postponed. Winter and Furneaux commenced a careful scrutiny of the ground behind the rock. They struck off on different paths, but came together at a little distance.

"THE trees," murmured Winter.

"Yes, when we are alone."

"Have you noticed——"

"These curious pads. They mean a lot. It's not so easy, James."

"I'm growing interested, I admit."

They rejoined the others.

"Did you tell me that only you and Police Constable Farrow visited this part of the wood?" said Furneaux to Bates.

"I don't remember tellin' you, sir, but that's the fact," said the keeper.

"Well, warn all the estate hands to keep away from this section during the next few days. You will give orders to Farrow to that effect, Inspector?"

"Yes. If they go trampling all over, you won't know where you are when it comes to a close search," was the cheerful answer. "Now, about that gun—it must be hidden somewhere in the undergrowth. The man who fired it would never dare carry it along an open road on a fine morning like this, when everybody is astir."

"You're undoubtedly right," said Winter. "But here come assorted boots. They may help us a bit."

Tomlinson was a man of method. He and Farrow had brought two wicker baskets, such as are used in laundry work. He was rather breathless.

"House—and estate," he wheezed, pointing to each basket in turn.

"Go ahead, Furneaux," said Winter. "Because I ought to stoop, I don't."

The little man choked back some gibe; the presence of strangers enforced respect to his chief. He took a thin folding rule of aluminum from a waistcoat pocket, and applied it to the most clearly defined of the three footprints. Then, beginning at the "house" basket, he ran over the contents rapidly. One pair of boots he set aside. After testing the "estate" basket without success, he seized one of the selected pair, and pressed it into the earth close to an original print. He looked up at Tomlinson, who was in a violent perspiration.

"Whose boot is this?" he asked.

"God help us, sir, it's Mr. Robert's!" said Tomlinson in an agonized tone.

The Inspector, Farrow and Bates were visibly thrilled; but Furneaux only sank back on his heels, and peered at the boot.

"I don't understand why any one should feel upset because these footprints (which, by the way, were not made by this pair of boots) happen to resemble marks which may have been made by Mr. Robert Fenley," he said, apparently talking to himself. "These marks are three or four days old. Mr. Robert Fenley went away on Saturday. Today is Wednesday. He may have been here on Saturday morning. What does it matter if he was? The man who murdered his father must have been here two hours ago."

Sensation! Tomlinson mopped his forehead with a handkerchief already a wet rag; Farrow, not daring to interfere, nibbled his chin strap; Bates scowled with relief. But the Inspector, after a husky cough, spoke.

"Would you mind telling me, Mr. Furneaux, why you are so sure?" he said.

"Now, Professor Bates, you tell him," cackled Furneaux.

The keeper dropped on his knees by the side of the detective, and gazed critically at the marks.

"At this time o' year, gentlemen, things do grow wonderful," he said slowly. "In this sort o' ground, where there's wet an' shade, there's a kind o' constant movement. This here new print is clean, an' the broken grass an' crushed leaves haven't had time to straighten themselves, as one might say. But, in this other lot, the shoots are commencin' to perk up, an' insec's have stirred the mold. It's just the difference atween a new run for rabbits and an old 'un."

"Thank you, Bates," broke in Winter sharply. "Now, we must not waste any more time in demonstrations. Mr. Furneaux explained this thing purposely, to show the folly of jumping at conclusions. Innocent men have been hanged before today on just such evidence as this. We should deem ourselves lucky that these footprints were found so soon after the crime was committed. Tomorrow, or next day, there might have been a doubt in our minds. Luckily there is none. The man who shot Mr. Fenley this morning—" he paused; Furneaux alone appreciated his difficulty— "could not possibly have left those marks today."

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It was a lame ending, but it sufficed. Four of his hearers took him to mean that the unknown, whose feet had left their impress in the soil, could not have been the murderer; but Furneaux growled in French—

"You tripped badly that time, my friend. You need another cigar!"

Seemingly, he was soliloquizing, and none understood except the one person for whose benefit the sarcasm was intended.

Winter felt the spur, but because he was a really great detective it only stimulated him. Nothing more was said until the little procession reached the avenue. During their brief disappearance in the leafy depths two cars and three motorcycles had arrived at The Towers. A glance sufficed. The newspapers had heard of the murder; this was the advance guard of an army of reporters and photographers. Winter buttonholed the Inspector.

"I'll tell you the most valuable service you can render at this moment," he said. "Arrange that a constable shall mount guard at the rock till nightfall. Then place two on duty. With four men you can provide the necessary reliefs, but I want that place watched continuously, and intruders warned off till further notice. This man who happens to be here might go on duty immediately. Then you can make your plans at leisure."

THUS, by the quaint contriving of chance, Police Constable Farrow, whose stalwart form and stubborn zeal had blocked the path to the Quarry Wood since a few minutes after ten o'clock, was deputed to continue that particular duty till a comrade took his place.

His face fell when he heard that he was condemned to solitude, shut out from all the excitement of the hour, debarred even, as he imagined, from standing on the rock and watching the comings and goings at the mansion. But Winter was a kindly if far-seeing student of human nature.

"It will be a bit slow for you," he said, when the Inspector had given Farrow his orders. "But you can amuse yourself by an occasional peep at the landscape, and there is no reason why you shouldn't smoke."

Farrow saluted.

"Do you mean, sir, that I can show myself?"

"Why not? The mere fact that your presence is known will warn off priers. Remember—no one, absolutely no one except the police, is to be allowed to pass the quarry, or approach from any side within hailing distance."

"Not even from the house, sir?"

"Exactly. Mr. Fenley and Miss Manning may be told, if necessary, why you are there, and I am sure they will respect my wishes."

Farrow turned back. It was not so bad, then. These Scotland Yard fellows had chosen him for an important post, and that hint about a pipe was distinctly human. Odd thing, too, that Mr. Robert Fenley was not expected to put in an appearance, or the Superintendent would have mentioned him with the others.

On reaching the house there were evidences of disturbance. Hilton Fenley stood in the doorway, and was haranguing the newspaper men in a voice harsh with anger. This intrusion was unwarranted, illegal, impudent. He would have them expelled by force. When he caught sight of the Inspector he demanded fiercely that names and addresses should be taken, so that his solicitors might issue summonses for trespass.

All this, of course, made excellent copy, and Winter put an end to the scene by drawing the reporters aside and giving them a fairly complete account of the murder. Incidentally, he sent off the Inspector post haste on his bicycle to station a constable at each gate, and stop the coming invasion. The house telephone, too, closed the main gate effectually, so when the earliest scouts had rushed away to connect with Fleet Street order was restored.

Winter was puzzled by Fenley's display of passion. It was only to be expected that the newspapers would break out in a rash of black headlines over the murder of a prominent London financier. By hook or by crook, journalism would triumph. He had often been amazed at the extent and accuracy of news items concerning the most secret inquiries. Of course the reporters sometimes missed the heart of an intricate case. In this instance, they had never heard of the bond robbery, though the numbers of the stolen securities had been advertised widely. Moreover, he was free to admit that if every fact known to the police were published broadcast, no one would be a penny the worse; for thus far the crime was singularly lacking in motive.

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Meanwhile Furneaux had fastened on to Brodie again.

"You saw me at once?" he began.

"I couldn't miss you, sir," said the chauffeur, a solid, stolid mechanic, who understood his engine and a road map thoroughly, and left the rest to Providence. "I wasn't payin' particular attention, yet I twigged you the minute you popped up."

"So it is reasonable to suppose that if any one had appeared in that same place this morning, and taken steady aim at Mr. Fenley, you would have twigged him, too."

"It strikes me that way, sir."

"Did you see nothing—not even a puff of smoke? You must certainly have looked at the wood when you heard the shot."

"I did, sir. Not a leaf moved. Just a couple of pheasants flew out, and the rooks around the house kicked up such a row that I didn't know the guv'nor was down till Harris shouted."

"Where did the pheasants fly from?"

"They kem out a bit below the rock; but they were risin' birds, an' may have started from the ground higher up."

"No birds were startled before the shot was fired?"

"Not to my knowledge, sir. But June pheasants are very tame, and they lie marvelous close. A pheasant would just as soon run as fly."

The detectives began a detailed inquiry almost at once. It covered the ground already traversed, and the only new incident happened when Hilton Fenley, at the moment repeating his evidence, was called to the telephone.

"If either of you cares to smoke there are cigars and Virginia cigarettes on the sideboard," he said. "Or, if you prefer Turkish, here are some," and he laid a gold case on the table. Furneaux grabbed it when the door had closed.

"All neurotics use Turkish cigarettes," he said solemnly. "Ah, I guessed it! A strong, vile, scented brand!"

"Sometimes, my dear Charles, you talk rubbish," sighed Winter.

"Maybe. I never think or smoke it. 'Language was given us to conceal our thoughts,' said Talleyrand. I have always admired Talleyrand, 'that rather middling bishop but very eminent knave,' as de Quincey called him. *'Cré nom!* I wonder what de Quincey meant by 'middling.' A man who could keep in the front rank under the Bourbons, during the Revolution, with Napoleon, and back again under the Bourbons, and yet die in bed, must have been superhuman. St. Peter, in his stead, would have lost his napper at least four times."

WINTER stirred uneasily, and gazed out across the Italian garden and park, for the detectives were again installed in the dining-room.

"What about that artist, Trenholme?" he said, after a pause.

"We'll look him up. Before leaving this house I want to peep into various rooms. And there's Tomlinson. Tomlinson is a rich mine. Do leave him to me. I'll dig into him deep, and extract ore of high percentage—see if I don't."

"Do you know, Charles, I've a notion that we shall get closer to bed-rock in London than here."

Furneaux pretended to look for an invisible halo surrounding his chief's close-cropped bullet head.

"Sometimes," he said reverently, "you frighten me when you bring off a brilliant remark like that. I seem to see lightning zigzagging round Jove's dome."

Fenley returned.

"It was a call from the bank," he announced. "They have just seen the newspapers. I told them I would run up to town this afternoon."

"Then you did not telephone Bishopsgate Street earlier?" inquired Winter, permitting himself to be surprised.

"No. I had other things to bother me."

"Now, Mr. Fenley, can you tell me where your brother is?"

"I can not."

He placed a rather unnecessary emphasis on the negative. The question seemed to disturb him. Evidently, if he could consult his own wishes, he would prefer not to discuss his brother.

"I take it he has not been home since leaving here on Saturday?" persisted Winter.

"That is so."

"Had he quarreled with your father?"

"There was a dispute. Really, Mr. Winter, I must decline to go into family affairs."

"But the probability is that the more we know the less our knowledge will affect your brother."

The door opened again. Mr. Winter was wanted on the telephone. Then there

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happened one of those strange coincidences which Furneaux's caustic wit had christened "Winter's Yorkers," being a weird play on the lines:

> Now is the Winter of our discontent
> Made glorious Summer by this sun of York.

For the Superintendent had scarcely squeezed his big body into the telephone box when he became aware of a mixup on the line; a querulous voice was saying:

"I insist on being put through. I am speaking from Mr. Fenley's bank, and it is monstrous that I should be kept waiting. I've been trying for twenty minutes——"

Buzz. The protest was squelched.

"Are you there?" came the calm accents of the Assistant Commissioner.

"Yes, sir," said Winter.

"Any progress?"

"A little. Oddly enough, you are in the nick of time to help materially. Will you ring off, and find out from the exchange who 'phoned here two minutes ago? I don't mean Fenley's Bank, which is just trying to get through. I want to know who made the preceding call, which was effective."

"I understand. Good-by."

Winter explained in the dining-room that the Assistant Commissioner was anxious for news. He had hardly finished when the footman reappeared. A call for Mr. Hilton Fenley.

"Confound the telephone," snapped Fenley. "We won't have a moment's peace all day, I suppose."

Winter winked heavily at Furneaux. He waited until Fenley's hurried footsteps across a creaking parquet floor had died away.

"This is the bank's call," he murmured. "The other was from the Lord knows who. I've put the Yard on the track. I wonder why he lied about it."

"He's a queer sort of brother, too," said Furneaux. "It strikes me he wants to put Robert in the cart."

CHAPTER V

A FAMILY GATHERING

FENLEY was frowning when he reappeared.

"Another call from the Bank," he said gruffly. "Everything there is at sixes and sevens since the news was howled through the City. That is why I really must go to town later. I'm not altogether sorry. The necessity of bringing my mind to bear on business will leaven the surfeit of horrors I've borne this morning. . . .

"Now, about my brother, Mr. Winter. While listening to Mr. Brown's condolences —you remember Brown, the cashier, Mr. Furneaux—I was thinking of more vital matters. A policy of concealment often defeats its own object, and I have come to the conclusion that you ought to know of a dispute between my father and Robert. There's a woman in the case, of course. It's a rather unpleasant story, too. Poor Bob got entangled with a married woman some months ago. He was infatuated at first, but would have broken it off recently were it not for fear of divorce proceedings."

"Would you make the position a little clearer, sir?" said Winter, who also was listening and thinking. He was quite certain that when he met Mr. Brown he would meet the man who had been worrying a telephone exchange "during the last twenty minutes."

"I—I can't." And Fenley's hand brushed away some imaginary film from before his eyes. "Bob and I never hit it off very well. We're only half brothers, you see."

"Was your father married twice?"

"Am I to reopen a forgotten history?"

"Some person, or persons, may not have forgotten it."

"Well, you must have the full story, if at all. My father was not a well born man. Thirty years ago he was a trainer in the service of a rich East Indian merchant, Anthony Drummond, of Calcutta, who owned racehorses, and one of Drummond's daughters fell in love with him. They ran away and got married, but the marriage was a failure. She divorced him—by mutual consent, I fancy. Anyhow, *I* was left on his hands.

"He went to Assam, and fell in with a tea planter named Manning, who had a big estate, but neglected it for racing. My father suddenly developed business instincts and Manning made him a partner. Unfortunately—well, that is a hard word, but it applies—my father married again—a girl of his own class; rather beneath it, in fact. Then Bob was born.

"The old man made money, heaps of it. Manning married, but lost his wife when

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Sylvia came into the world. That broke him up; he drank himself to death, leaving his partner as trustee and guardian for the infant. There was a boom in tea estates; my father sold on the crest of the wave and came to London. He progressed, but Mrs. Fenley—didn't. She was just a Tommy's daughter, and never seemed to try and rise above the level of 'married quarters'.

"I had to mind my p's and q's as a boy, I can assure you. My mother was always thrown in my teeth. Mrs. Fenley called her 'black'. It was a —— lie. She was dark-skinned, as I am, but there are Cornish and Welsh folk of much darker complexion. My father, too, shared something of the same prejudice. I had to be the good boy of the family. Otherwise, I should have been turned out, neck and crop.

"As I behaved well, he was forced to depend on me, because Bob did as he liked, with his mother always ready to aid and abet him. Then came this scrape I've spoken of. I believe Bob was being blackmailed. That's the long and the short of it. Now you know the plain, ungarbled facts. Better that they should come from me than reach you with the decorations of gossip and servants' tittle-tattle."

The somewhat strained and metallic voice ceased. Fenley was seated at the corner of the table near the door. Seemingly yielding to that ever-present desire for movement, he pushed with his foot an arm chair out of its place at the head of the table.

Sylvia Manning had pointed out that chair to Furneaux as the one occupied by Mortimer Fenley at breakfast.

"Is the first Mrs. Fenley dead?" said Furneaux suddenly.

"I don't think so," said Fenley, after a pause.

"You are not sure?"

"No."

"Have you ever tried to find out?"

"No, I dare not."

"May I ask why?"

"If it were discovered that my mother and I were in communication I would have been given short shrift in the Bank."

"Did she marry again?"

"I don't know."

Again there was silence. Furneaux seemed to be satisfied that he was following a blind alley, and Winter became the inquisitor.

"WHAT is the name of the woman with whom your brother is mixed up?"

"I can not tell you, but my father knew."

"What leads you to form that opinion?"

"Some words that passed between Bob and him last Saturday morning."

"Where? Here?"

"Yes, in the hall. Tomlinson heard more distinctly than I. I saw there was trouble brewing, and kept out of it—hung back, on the pretense of reading a newspaper."

"As to the missing rifle—can you help us there?"

"Not in the least. I wish to Heaven Bob had gone to Africa, as he was planning. Then all this misery would have been avoided."

"Do you mean your father's death?"

Fenley started. He had not weighed his words.

"Oh, no, no!" he cried hurriedly. "Don't try to trip me into admissions, Mr. Winter. I can't stand that, dashed if I can."

He jumped up, went to the sideboard and mixed himself a weak brandy and soda, which he swallowed as if his throat was afire with thirst.

"I am not treating you as a hostile witness, sir," answered Winter calmly. "Mr. Furneaux and I are merely clearing the ground. Soon we shall know, or believe that we know, what line to avoid and what to follow."

"Is Miss Sylvia Manning engaged to be married?" put in Furneaux. Fenley gave him a fiendish look.

"What the deuce has Miss Manning's matrimonial prospects got to do with this inquiry?" he said, and the venom in his tone was hardly to be accounted for by Furneaux's harmless-sounding query.

"One never knows," said the little man, taking the unexpected attack with bland indifference. "You don't appreciate our position in this matter. We are not judges, but guessers. We sit in the stalls of a theater, watching people on the stage of real life playing four acts of a tragedy, and it is our business to construct the fifth, which is produced in court. Let me give you a wildly supposititious version of that fifth act now. Suppose some neurotic fool was in love with Miss Manning, or her money, and Mr. Mortimer Fenley opposed the project. That would supply a motive for the murder. Do you take the point?"

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"I'm sorry I blazed out at you. Miss Manning is not engaged to be married, nor likely to be for many a day."

Now, the obvious question was, "Why, she being such an attractive young lady?" But Furneaux never put obvious questions. He turned to Winter with the air of one who had nothing more to say. His colleague was evidently perplexed, and showed it, but extricated the others from an awkward situation with the tact for which he was noted.

"I am much obliged to you for your candor in supplying such a clear summary of the family history, Mr. Fenley," he said. "Of course, we shall be meeting you frequently during the next few days, and developments can be discussed as they arise."

His manner, more than his words, conveyed an intimation that when the opportunity served he would trounce Furneaux for an indiscretion. Fenley was mollified.

"Command me in every way," he said.

"There is one more question, the last and the gravest," said Winter seriously. "Do you suspect any one of committing this murder?"

"No! On my soul and honor, no!"

"Thank you, sir. We'll tackle the butler now, if you, please."

"I'll send him," said Fenley. Probably in nervous forgetfulness, he lighted a cigarette and went out, blowing two long columns of smoke through his nostrils. He might, or might not, have been pleased had he heard the reprimanding of Furneaux.

"Good stroke, that about the stage, Charles," mumbled Winter. Furneaux threw out his hands with a gesture of disgust.

"What an actor the man is!" he almost hissed, owing to the need there was of subduing his piping voice to a whisper. "Every word thought out, but allowed to be dragged forth reluctantly. Putting brother Bob into the tureen, isn't he? 'On my soul and honor,' too! Don't you remember, some French blighter said that when an innocent man was being made a political scapegoat? . . . Of course, the mother is a Eurasian, and he has met her. A nice dish he served up! A salad of easily ascertainable facts with a dressing of lying innuendo. Name of a pipe! If Master Hilton hadn't been in the house——"

A knock, and the door opened.

"You want me, gentlemen, I am informed by Mr. Hilton Fenley," said Tomlinson.

There spoke the butler, discreet, precise, incapable of error. Tomlinson had recovered his breath and his dignity. He was in his own domain. The very sight of the Mid-Victorian furniture gave him confidence. His skilled glance traveled to the decanter and the empty glass. He knew to a minim how much brandy had evaporated since his last survey of the sideboard.

"Sit down, Tomlinson," said Winter pleasantly. "You must have been dreadfully shocked by this morning's occurrence."

TOMLINSON sat down. He drew the chair somewhat apart from the table, knowing better than to place his elbows on that sacred spread of polished mahogany.

"I was, sir," he admitted. "Indeed, I may say I shall always be shocked by the remembrance of it."

"Mr. Mortimer Fenley was a kindly employer?"

"One of the best, sir. He liked things done just so, and could be sharp if there was any laxity, but I have never received a cross word from him."

"Known him long?"

"Ever since he come to The Towers; nearly twenty years."

"And Mrs. Fenley?"

"Mrs. Fenley leaves the household entirely under my control, sir. She never interferes."

"Why?"

"She is an invalid."

"Is she so ill that she can not be seen?"

"Practically that, sir."

"Been so for twenty years?"

Tomlinson coughed. He was prepared with an ample statement as to the catastrophe which took place at nine thirty A. M., but this delving into bygone decades was unexpected and decidedly distasteful, it would seem.

"Mrs. Fenley is unhappily addicted to the drug habit, sir," he said severely, plainly hinting that there were bounds, even for detectives.

"I fancied so," was the dry response. "However, I can understand and honor your reluctance to reveal Mrs. Fenley's failings. Now, please tell us exactly what Mr. Fenley and Mr. Robert said to each

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other in the hall last Saturday morning."

How poor Farrow, immured in his jungle, would have gloated over Tomlinson's collapse when he heard those fatal words! To his credit be it said, the butler had not breathed a word to a soul concerning the scene between father and son. He knew nothing of an inquisitive housemaid, and his tortured brain fastened on Hilton Fenley as the Paul Pry. Unconsciously, he felt bitter against his new master from that moment.

"Must I go into these delicate matters, sir?" he bleated.

"Most certainly. The man whom you respected so greatly has been killed, not in the course of a heated dispute, but as the outcome of a brutal and well conceived plan. Bear that in mind, and you will see that concealment of vital facts is not only unwise but disloyal."

Winter rather let himself go in his earnestness. He flushed slightly, and dared not look at Furneaux lest he should encounter an admiring glance.

The butler, however, was far too worried to pay heed to his questioner's florid turn of speech. He sighed deeply. He felt like a timid swimmer in a choppy sea, knowing he was out of his depth yet compelled to struggle blindly.

So, with broken utterance, he repeated the words which a rabbit-eared housemaid had carried to Bates. Nevertheless, even while he labored on, he fancied that the detectives did not attach such weight to the recital as he feared. He anticipated that Winter would write each syllable in a notebook, and show an exceeding gravity of appreciation. To his great relief, nothing of the kind happened. Winter's comment was distinctly helpful.

"It must have been rather disconcerting for you to hear father and son quarreling openly," he said.

"Sir, it was most unpleasant."

"Now, did you form any opinion as to the cause of this bickering? For instance, did you imagine that Mr. Fenley wished his son to break off relations with an undesirable acquaintance?"

"I did, sir."

"Is either Mr. Hilton or Mr. Robert engaged to be married? Or, I had better put it, had their father expressed any views as to either of his sons marrying suitably?"

"We, in the house, sir, had a notion that Mr. Fenley would like Mr. Robert to marry Miss Sylvia."

"Exactly. I expected that. Were these two young people of the same way of thinking?"

"They were friendly, sir, but more like brother and sister. You see, they were reared together. It often happens that way when a young gentleman and young lady grow up from childhood in each other's company. They never think of marriage, whereas the same young gentleman would probably fall head over heels in love with the same young lady if he met her elsewhere."

"Good!" broke in Furneaux. "Tomlinson, do you drink port?"

The butler looked his astonishment, but answered readily enough—

"My favorite wine, sir."

"I thought so. Taken in moderation, port induces sound reasoning. I have some Alto Douro of '61. I'll bring you a bottle."

Tomlinson was mystified, a trifle scandalized perhaps; but he bowed his acknowledgments.

"Sir, I will appreciate it greatly."

"I know you will. My Alto Douro goes down no gullet but a connoisseur's."

Even in his agitation, Tomlinson smiled. What a queer little man this undersized detective was, to be sure, and how oddly he expressed himself!

"I ASK this only as a matter of form, but did Mr. Robert Fenley take his .450 Express rifle when he went away on Saturday?" said Winter.

"No, sir. He had only a valise strapped to the carrier. But I do happen to know that the gun was in his room on Friday, because Friday is my day for house inspection."

"Any cartridges?"

"I can't say, sir. They would be in a drawer, or, more likely, in the gun room."

"Where is this gun room?"

"Next to the harness room, sir—second door to the right in the courtyard."

"Speaking absolutely in confidence, have you formed a theory as to this murder?"

"No, sir. But if any sort of evidence is piled up against Mr. Robert I shall not credit it. No power on earth could make me believe that he would kill his father in cold blood. He respected his father, sir. He's a bit wild, as young men with too

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much money are apt to be, but he was good-hearted and genuine."

"Yet he did speak of blowing his own brains out, and his father's."

"That was his silly way of talking, sir. He would say, 'Tomlinson, if you tell the pater what time I came home last night I'll stab you to the heart.' When there was a bit of a family squabble he would threaten to mix a gallon of weed-killer and drink every drop. Everything was rotten, or beastly, or awfully ripping. He was not so well educated as he ought to have been—Mrs. Fenley's fault entirely; and he hadn't the—the words——"

"The vocabulary."

"That's it, sir. I see you understand."

"Tomlinson," interrupted Furneaux, "a famous American writer, Oliver Wendell Holmes, described adjectives of that class as the bank checks of intellectual bankruptcy. You have hit on the same great thought."

The butler smiled again. He was beginning to like Furneaux.

"You have never heard, I suppose, of Mr. Fenley receiving any threatening letters?" continued Winter.

"No, sir. Some stupid postcards were sent when he tried to close a right of way through the park; but they were merely ridiculous, and that occurred years ago."

"So you, like the rest of us, feel utterly unable to assign a motive for this crime?"

"Sir, it's like a thunderbolt from a clear sky."

"Were the brothers, or half brothers, on good terms with each other?"

Tomlinson started at those words, "or half brothers." He was not prepared for the Superintendent's close acquaintance with the Fenley records.

"They're as different as chalk and cheese, sir," he said, after a pause to collect his wits. "Mr. Hilton is clever and well read, and cares nothing about sport, though he has a wonderful steady nerve. Yes, I mean that——" for Winter's prominent eyes showed surprise at the statement. "He's a strange mixture, is Mr. Hilton. He's a fair nailer with a revolver. I've seen him hit a penny three times straight off at twelve paces, and, when in the mind, he would bowl over running rabbits with a rook rifle. Yet he never joined the shooting parties in October. Said it made him ill to see graceful birds shattered by clumsy folk. All the same, he would ill-treat a horse something shameful. I——"

The butler bethought himself, and pulled up with a jerk. But Winter smiled encouragingly.

"Say what you had in mind," he said. "You are not giving evidence. You may rely on our discretion."

"Well, sir, he's that sort of man who must have his own way, and when things went against him at home, he'd take it out of any servant or animal that vexed him afterwards."

"It was not an ideally happy household, I take it?"

"Things went along very smoothly, sir, all things considered. They have been rather better since Miss Sylvia came home from Brussels. She was worried about Mrs. Fenley at first, but gave it up as a bad job; and Mr. Fenley and the young gentlemen used to hide their differences before her. That was why Mr. Fenley and Mr. Robert blazed up in the hall on Saturday. They couldn't say a word in front of Miss Sylvia at the breakfast table."

"The four always met at breakfast, then?"

"Almost without fail, sir. On Monday and Tuesday mornings Mr. Hilton breakfasted early, and his father was joking about it, for if any one was late it would be him—or should I say 'he', sir?"

Furneaux cackled.

"I wouldn't have you alter your speech on any account," he grinned. "Why did Mr. Hilton turn over these new leaves on Monday and Tuesday?"

"He said he had work to do. What it was I don't know, sir. But he managed to miss the nine forty-five, and Mr. Fenley was vexed about it. Of course, I don't know why I am telling you these small things. Mr. Hilton might be angry——"

Some one knocked. Harris, the footman, entered, a scared look on his face.

"Can you come a moment, Mr. Tomlinson?" he said. "The undertaker is here for the body."

"What is that?" cried Winter sharply.

The butler arose.

"Didn't Mr. Hilton mention it, sir?" he said. "Dr. Stern must hold a post mortem before the inquest, and he suggested that it could be carried through more easily in the mortuary attached to the Cottage Hospital. Isn't that all right, sir?"

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"Oh, yes. I'm sorry. I didn't understand. Go, by all means. We'll wait here."

WHEN they were alone, the two detectives remained silent for a long minute. Winter arose and looked through a window at the scene outside. A closed hearse had arrived; some men were carrying in a rough coffin and three trestles. There was none of the gorgeous trappings which lend dignity to such transits in public. Polished oak and gleaming brass and rare flowers would add pageantry later; this was the livery of the dissecting-room.

"Queer case!" growled Winter over his shoulder.

"If only Hilton had breakfasted early *this* morning!" said Furneaux.

"If the dog hadn't stopped to scratch himself he would have caught the hare," was the irritable answer.

"Aren't you pleased with Tomlinson, then?"

"The more he opened up the more puzzled I became. By the way, you hardly asked him a thing, though you were keen on tackling him yourself."

"James, I'm an artist. You handled him so neatly that I stood by and appreciated. It would be mean to suggest that the prospect of a bottle of Alto Douro quickened his imagination. I——"

Winter's hands were crossed behind his back, and his fingers worked in expressive pantomime. Furneaux was by his side in an instant. Hilton Fenley was standing on the steps, a little below and to the left of the window. He was gazing with a curiously set stare at the bust of Police Constable Farrow perched high among the trees to the right. The observers in the room had then an excellent opportunity to study him at leisure.

"More of Asia than of Europe in that face and figure," murmured Furneaux.

"The odd thing is that he should be more interested in our sentinel than in the disposal of his father's body," commented Winter.

"A live donkey is always more valuable than a dead lion."

"We shall have to go to that wood soon, Charles."

"Your only failing is that you can't see the forest for the trees."

They were bickering, an ominous sign for some one yet unknown. Suddenly, far down the avenue, they saw a motor bicycle traveling fast. Hilton Fenley saw it at the same moment and screened his eyes with a hand, for he was bareheaded and the sun was now blazing with noonday intensity.

"Brother Bob!" hissed Furneaux.

Winter thought the other had recognized the man crouched over the handle bar.

"Gee!" he said. "Your sight must be good."

"I'm not using eyes, but brains. Who else can it be? This is the psychological moment which never fails. Bet you a new hat I'm right."

"I'm not buying you any new hats," said Winter. "Look at Hilton. He knows. Now, I wonder if the other one telephoned. No. He'd have told us. He'd guess it would crop up in talk some time or other. Yes, the motorist is waving to him. There! You can see his face. It *is* Robert, isn't it?"

"Oh, sapient one!" snapped Furneaux.

The meeting between the brothers was orthodox in its tragic friendliness. The onlookers could supply the words they were unable to hear. Robert Fenley, bigger, heavier, altogether more British in build and semblance than Hilton, was evidently asking breathlessly if the news he had read in London was true, and Hilton was volubly explaining what had happened, pointing to the wood, the doorway, the hearse, emphasizing with many gestures the painful story he had to tell.

Then the two young men mounted the steps, the inference being that Robert Fenley wished to see his father's body before it was removed. A pallor was spreading beneath the glow on the younger Fenley's perspiring face. He was obviously shocked beyond measure. Grief and horror had imparted a certain strength to somewhat sullen features. He might be a ne'er-do-well, a loose liver, a good deal of a fool, perhaps, but he was learning one of life's sharpest lessons; in time, it might bring out what was best in his character. The detectives understood now why the butler, who knew the boy even better than his own father, deemed it impossible that he should be a parricide. Some men are constitutionally incapable of committing certain crimes. At least, the public thinks so; Scotland Yard knows better, and studies criminology with an open mind.

The brothers had hardly crossed the threshold of the house when an eldritch scream rang through the lofty hall. The

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detectives hastened from the dining-room, and forthwith witnessed a tableau which would have received the envious approval of a skilled producer of melodrama. The hall measured some thirty-five feet square, and was nearly as lofty, its ceiling forming the second floor. The staircase was on the right, starting from curved steps in the inner right angle and making a complete turn from a half landing to reach a gallery which ran around three sides of the first floor. The fourth contained the doorway, with a window on each hand and four windows above.

The stairs and the well of the hall were of oak, polished as to parquet and steps, but left to age and color naturally as to wainscot, balusters and rails. The walls of the upper floor were decorated in shades of dull gold and amber. The general effect was superb, either in daylight or when a great Venetian luster in the center of the ceiling blazed with electric lights.

THE body of the unfortunate banker had not been removed from the oaken settee at the back of the hall, and was still covered with a white sheet. An enormously stout woman, clothed in a dressing-gown of black lace, was standing in the cross gallery and resisting the gentle efforts of Sylvia Manning, now attired in black, to take her away. The stout woman's face was deathly white, and her distended eyes were gazing dully at the ominous figure stretched beneath. Two podgy hands, with rings gleaming on every finger, were clutching the carved railing, and the tenacity of their grip caused the knuckles to stand out in white spots on the ivory-tinted skin.

This, then, was Mrs. Fenley, in whom some vague stirring of the spirit had induced a consciousness that all was not well in the household with which she "never interfered."

It was she who had uttered that ringing shriek when some flustered maid blurted out that "the master" was dead, and her dazed brain had realized what the sheet covered. She lifted her eyes from that terrifying object when her son entered with Hilton Fenley.

"Oh, Bob!" she wailed. "They've killed your father! Why did you let them do it?"

Even in the agony of the moment the distraught young man was aware that his mother was in no fit state to appear thus openly.'

"Mother," he said roughly, "you oughtn't to be here, you know. Do go to your room with Sylvia. I'll come soon, and explain everything."

"Explain!" she wailed. "Explain your father's death! Who killed him? Tell me that, and I'll tear them with my nails. But is he dead? Did that hussy lie to me? You all tell me lies because you think I am a fool. Let me alone, Sylvia. I *will* go to my husband. Let me alone, or I'll strike you!"

By sheer weight she forced herself free from the girl's hands, and tottered down the stairs. At the half landing she fell to her knees, and Sylvia ran to pick her up. Then Hilton Fenley seemed to arouse himself from a stupor. Flinging a command at the servants, he rushed to Sylvia's assistance, and, helped by Tomlinson and a couple of footmen, half carried the screaming and fighting woman up the stairs again and along a corridor.

Thus it happened that Robert Fenley was left in the hall with the dead body of his father. He stood stock still, and seemed to follow with disapproval the manner of the disappearance of the poor creature whom he called mother. Her shrieks redoubled in volume as she understood that she would not be allowed to see her husband's corpse, and her son added to the uproar by shouting loudly:

"Hi, there! Don't ill-treat her, or I'll break all your —— necks! Confound you, be gentle with her!"

He listened till a door slammed, and a sudden cessation of the tumult showed that some one, in sheer self-defense, had given her morphia, the only sedative that could have any real effect. Then he turned, and became aware of the presence of the two detectives.

"Well," he said furiously, "who are you, and what the blazes do you want here? Get out, both of you, or I'll have you chucked out!"

CHAPTER VI

WHEREIN FURNEAUX SEEKS INSPIRATION FROM LITERATURE AND ART

THE head of the Criminal Investigation Department was not the sort of man to accept meekly whatsoever coarse commands Robert Fenley chose to fling at him.

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He met the newcomer's angry stare with a cold and steady eye.

"You should moderate your language in the presence of death, Mr. Fenley," he said. "We are here because it is our duty. You, on your part, would have acted more discreetly had you gone to your mother's assistance instead of swearing at those who were acting for the best under trying conditions."

"—— your eyes, are you speaking to me?" came the wrathful cry.

"Surely you have been told that your father is lying there dead!" went on Winter sternly. "Mrs. Fenley might have yielded readily to your persuasion, but your help took the form of threatening people who adopted the only other course possible. Calm yourself, sir, and try to remember that the father from whom you parted in anger has been murdered. My colleague and I represent Scotland Yard; we were brought here by your brother. See that you meet us in the dining-room in a quarter of an hour. Come, Furneaux!"

And, stirred for once to a feeling of deep annoyance, the big man strode out into the open air, with a sublime disregard for either the anger or the alarm struggling for mastery in Robert Fenley's sullen face.

"Phew!" he said, drawing a deep breath before descending the steps. "What an unlicked cub! And they wanted to marry that girl to him!"

"It sha'n't be done, James," said Furneaux.

"I actually lost my temper," puffed the other.

"Tell you what! Let's put the Inspector on to him. Tell the local sleuths half what we know, and they'll run him in like a shot."

"Pooh! He's all talk. Tomlinson is right. The neurotic Hilton has more nerve in his little finger than that dolt in the whole of his body."

"What did you think of his boots?"

"I shall be surprised if they don't fit those footprints exactly."

"They will. The left heel is evenly worn, but the right bears on the outer edge. Let's cool our fevered brows under the greenwood tree till this hearse is out of the way."

The butler, who had asked the undertaker's assistants to suspend operations when Robert Fenley arrived, now appeared at the door and signaled the men that they were free to proceed with their work. The detectives strolled into the wood, and soon were bending over some curious blotchy marks which somehow suggested the passage of a pad-footed animal rather than a human being. Bates, of course, would have noted them had he not been on the alert for footprints alone, but they had stared at Winter and Furneaux from the instant their regularity became apparent. They represented a stride considerably shorter than the average length of a man's pace, and were strongly marked when the surface was spongy enough to receive an impression. Except, however, in the slight hollow already described, the ground was so dry that traces of every sort were lost. In the vicinity of the rock, too, the only marks left were the scratches in the moss adhering to the steep sides of the boulder itself.

"What do you make of 'em, Charles?" inquired Winter, when both had puzzled for some minutes over the uncommon signs.

"Some one has thought out the footprint as a clue pretty thoroughly," said Furneaux. "He not only took care to leave a working model of one set, but was extremely anxious not to provide any data as to his own tootsies, so he fastened a bundle of rags under each boot, and walked like a cat on walnut shells."

Winter nodded.

"When we find the gun, too—it's somewhere in this wood—you'll see that the fingerprints won't help," he replied thoughtfully. "The man who remembered to safeguard his feet would not forget his hands. We're up against a tough proposition, young fellow-me-lad."

"Your way of thinking reminds me of Herbert Spencer's reason for not learning Latin grammar as a youth," grinned Furneaux.

"It would be a pity to spoil one of your high-class jokes; so what was the reason?"

"He refused to accept any statement unaccompanied by proof. The agreement of an adjective with its noun displeased him, because an arbitrary rule merely said it was so."

"An ingenious excuse for not learning a lesson, but I don't see——"

"Consider. Mortimer Fenley was shot dead at nine thirty this morning, and the bullet which killed him came from the neighborhood of the rock above our heads. One shot was fired. It was so certain, so

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true of aim, that the murderer made sure of hitting him—at a fairly long range, too. How many men were there in Roxton and Easton this morning—was there even one woman?—capable of sighting a rifle with such calm confidence of success? Mind you, Fenley had to be killed dead. No bungling. A severe wound from which he might recover would not meet the case at all. Again, how many rifles are there in the united parishes of Roxton and Easton of the type which fires expanding bullets?"

"Of course, those vital facts narrow down the field, but Hilton Fenley was unquestionably in the house."

Furneaux cackled shrilly.

"You're in Herbert's class, Charles," he cried, delighted at having trapped his big friend.

"PARDON me, gentlemen," said a voice from among the leaves, "but I thought you might like to know that Mr. Robert Fenley is starting off again on his motor bike."

Even as Police Constable Farrow spoke they heard the loud snorting of an exhaust, marking the initial efforts of a motor bicycle's engine to get under way. In a few seconds came the rhythmic beat of the machine as it gathered speed; the two men looked at each other and laughed.

"Master Robert defies the majesty of the law," said Winter dryly. "Perhaps, taking one consideration with another, it's the best thing he could have done."

"He is almost bound to enter London by the Edgeware Road," said Furneaux instantly.

"Just so. I noticed the make and number of his machine. A plain-clothes man on an ordinary bicycle can follow him easily from Brondesbury onwards. Time him, and get on the telephone while I keep Hilton in talk. If we're mistaken we'll ring up Brondesbury again."

Winter was curtly official in tone when Hilton Fenley came downstairs at his request.

"Why did your brother rush off in such an extraordinary hurry?" he asked.

"How can I tell you?" was the reply, given offhandedly, as if the matter was of no importance. "He comes and goes without consulting my wishes, I assure you."

"But I requested him to meet me here at this very hour. There are questions he has to answer, and it would have been best in his own interests had he not shirked them."

"I agree with you fully. I hadn't the least notion he meant going until I looked out on hearing the bicycle, and saw him racing down the avenue."

"Do you think, sir, he is making for London?"

"I suppose so. That is where he came from. He says he heard of his father's death through the newspapers, and it would not surprise me in the least if I did not see him again until after the funeral."

"Thank you, sir. I'm sorry I bothered you, but I imagined or hoped he had given you some explanation. His conduct calls for it."

The Superintendent's manner had gradually become more suave. He realized that these Fenleys were queer folk. Like the Pharisee, "they were not as other men," but whether the difference between them and the ordinary mortal arose from pride or folly or fear it was hard to say.

Hilton Fenley smiled wanly.

"Bob is adopting the supposed tactics of the ostrich when pursued," he said.

"But no one is pursuing him."

"I am speaking metaphorically, of course. He is in distress, and hides behind the first bush. He has no moral force—never had. Physically he doesn't know what fear is, but the specters of the mind loom large in his eyes. And now, Superintendent, I am just on the point of leaving for London. I shall return about six thirty. Do you remain?"

"No, sir. I shall return to town almost immediately. Mr. Furneaux will stop here. Can he have a bedroom in the house?"

"Certainly. Tomlinson will look after him. You are not going cityward, I suppose?"

"No sir. But if you care to have a seat in my car——"

"No, thanks. The train is quicker and takes me direct to London Bridge. Much obliged."

Fenley hurried to the cloakroom, which was situated under the stairs, but on a lower level than the hall. The telephone box was placed there, and Furneaux emerged as the other ran down a few steps. The little man hailed him cheerfully.

"I suppose, now," he said, "that hot

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headed brother of yours thinks he has dodged Scotland Yard till it suits his convenience to be interviewed. Strange how people insist on regarding us as novices in our own particular line. Now you wouldn't make that mistake, sir."

"What mistake? I wouldn't run away, if that is what you mean."

"I'm sure of that, sir. But Mr. Robert has committed the additional folly, from his point of view, of letting us know why he was so desperately anxious to get back to London."

"But he didn't say a word!"

"Ah, words, idle words!

"Words are like leaves; and where they most abound
Much fruit of sense beneath is rarely found.

"It is actions that count, sir. Deeds, not words. Now, Mr. Robert has been kind enough to give us the eloquent facts, because he will be followed from the suburbs and his whereabouts watched most carefully."

"Dear me! I hadn't thought of that," said Hilton Fenley slowly. Two ideas were probably warring in his brain at that moment. One classed Furneaux as a garrulous idiot; the other suggested that there might be method in such folly.

"That's a clever simile of Pope's about dense leaves betokening scarcity of fruit," went on Furneaux. "Of course it might be pushed too far. Think what a poisonous Dead Sea apple the Quarry Wood contained. Your father's murder might not have been possible today, but for the cover given by the trees."

FENLEY selected a dark overcoat and derby hat. He wore a black tie, but had made no other change in his costume.

"You are quite a literary detective, Mr. Furneaux," he commented.

"More literal than literary, sir. I have little leisure for reading, but I own an excellent memory. Nothing to boast of in that. It's indispensable in my profession."

"Obviously. Well, I must hurry away now. See you later."

He hastened out. His manner seemed to hint an annoyance; it conveyed indefinitely but subtly a suggestion that his father's death was far too serious a thing to be treated with such levity.

Furneaux sauntered slowly to the front door. By that time the Fenley car was speeding rapidly down the avenue.

"With luck," he said to Winter, who had joined him, "with any sort of luck both brothers should pass their father's body on the way to the mortuary. Sometimes, O worthy chief, I find myself regretting the ways and means of the days of old, when men believed in the Judicium Dei.

"Neither of those sons went near his dead father. If one of them had dared I wonder whether the blood would have liquefied. Do you remember, in the 'Nibelungenlied,' that Hagen is forced to prove his innocence by touching Siegfried's corpse—and fails? That is the point—he fails. Our own Shakespeare knew the dodge. When Henry VI was being borne to Chertsey in an open coffin, the Lady Anne made Gloster squirm by her cry:

"O gentlemen, see, see! Dead Henry's wounds
Open their congeal'd mouths, and bleed afresh.

"Why then did those sons fight shy of touching their father's body? Had it been your father or mine who was beaten down by a murderer's spite, we would surely have given him one farewell clasp of the hand."

Winter recognized the symptoms. His diminutive friend was examining the embryo of a theory already established in his mind. It was a mere shadow, something vague and dark and uncertain in outline. But it existed, and would assume recognizable shape when an active imagination had fitted some shreds of proof to that which was yet without form and void. At that crisis, contradiction was a tonic.

"I think you're in error in one respect," said Winter quietly. "Hilton Fenley went to his father's assistance, and we don't know whether or not Robert did not approach the body."

"You're wrong, most sapient one. Before telephoning Brondesbury I asked Harris to tell me exactly what happened after the banker dropped at his feet. Harris shouted and knelt over him. Miss Manning ran and lifted his head. Tomlinson, Harris and Brodie carried him to the settee. Hilton Fenley never touched him.

"What of Robert? We cleared out, leaving him there alone."

"I watched him until the undertaker's men were called back. Up to that time he hadn't moved. Bet you a new hat the men will tell you he never went nearer."

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"You buy your own new hats," said Winter. "Do you want me to stand you two a day? I'm off to the Yard. I'll look up two lines in town. 'Phone through if you want help and I'll come. You sleep here tonight if you care to. Tomlinson will provide. How about the wood?"

"Leave it."

"You'll see that artist, Trenholme?"

"Yes."

"And the bedrooms?"

"Going there now."

"So long! Sorry I must quit, but I'm keen to clear up that telephone call."

"If you're in the office about six I'll tell you the whole story."

"Charles," said Winter earnestly, placing a hand on his colleague's shoulder, "we gain nothing by rushing our fences. This is the toughest job we've handled this year; there's a hard road to travel before we sit down and prepare a brief for counsel."

"Of course I meant the story up to the six o'clock instalment."

Winter smiled. He sprang into the car, the chauffeur having already started the engine in obedience to a word from the Superintendent.

"Stop at the Brondesbury police station," was the order, and Furneaux was left alone. He reëntered the house and crooked a finger at the butler, who had not summoned up courage to retire to his own sanctum, though a midday meal was awaiting him.

"Take me upstairs," said the detective. "I shall not detain you many minutes. Then you and I will have a snack together and you'll borrow a bicycle for me, and I sha'n't trouble you any more till a late hour."

"No trouble at all, sir," Tomlinson assured him. "If I could advance your inquiry in the least degree I'd fast cheerfully all day."

"What I like about you, Tomlinson, is your restraint," said Furneaux. "Many a man would have offered to fast a week, not meaning to deny himself a toothful five minutes longer than was avoidable. Now you really mean what you say—— Ah, this is Mr. Robert's den. And that is his bedroom, with dressing-room adjoining. Very cozy, to be sure. Of course the rooms have been dusted regularly since he disappeared on Saturday?"

"Every day, sir."

"Well, I hate prying into people's rooms. Beastly liberty, I call it. Now for Mr. Hilton's."

"Is that all, sir?" inquired the butler, manifestly surprised by the cursory glance which the detective had given around the suite of apartments.

"All at present, thank you. Like the Danites' messengers, I'm only spying out the lie of the land. Ah, each brother occupied a corner of the east wing. Robert, north, Hilton, south—a most equitable arrangement. Now these rooms show signs of tenancy, eh?"

THEY were standing in Hilton Fenley's sitting-room, having traversed the whole of the gallery around the hall to reach it. The remains of a fire in the grate caught Furneaux's eye, and the butler coughed apologetically.

"Mr. Hilton won't have his rooms touched, sir, until he leaves home of a morning," he said. "He likes to find his papers, et cetera, where he put them overnight. As a rule the housemaid comes here soon after breakfast, but this morning—naturally——"

"Of course, of course," assented the other promptly. "Everything is at sixes and sevens. Would you mind sending the girl here? I'd like to have a word with her."

Tomlinson moved ponderously towards an electric bell.

"No," said Furneaux. "Don't ring. Just ask her to come. Then she can bring me to your place and we'll nibble something. Meanwhile I'll enjoy this view."

"Certainly, sir. That will suit me admirably."

Tomlinson walked out with stately tread. His broad back was scarcely turned before the detective's nimble feet had carried him into the bedroom, which stood in the south-east angle. He seemed to fly around the room like one possessed of a fiend of unrest. Picking up a glass tumbler, he sniffed it and put it in a pocket. He peered at the bed, the dressing-table, the carpet; opened drawers and wardrobe doors, examined towels in the bathroom, and stuffed one beneath his waistcoat.

Running back to the sitting-room, he found a torn envelope, and began picking up some specks of grit from the carpet, each of which went into a corner of the envelope, which he folded and stowed away. Then he bent over the fireplace and rummaged

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among the cinders. Three calcined lumps, not wholly consumed, appeared to interest him. A newspaper was handy; he wrapped the grimy treasure trove in a sheet, and that small parcel also went into a pocket.

When a swish of skirts on the stairs announced the housemaid he retreated to the bedroom, and the girl found him standing at a south window, gazing out over the fair vista of the Italian terraces and the rolling parkland.

"Yes, sir," said the girl timidly.

He turned, as if he had not heard her approach. She was pale, and her eyes were red, for the feminine portion of the household was in a state of collapse.

"I only wanted to ask why a fire is laid in the sitting-room in such fine weather," he said.

"Mr. Hilton sits up late, sir, and if the evening is at all chilly, he puts a match to the grate himself."

"Ah, a silly question. Don't tell anybody I spoke of it or they'll think me a funny detective, won't they?"

He smiled genially, and the girl's face brightened.

"I don't see that, sir," she said. "I don't know why Mr. Hilton wanted a fire last night. It was quite hot. I slept with my window wide open."

"A very healthy habit, too. Do you attend to Mr. Robert's suite?"

"Yes, sir."

"Does *he* have a fire?"

"Never in the Summer, sir."

"He's a warmer-blooded creature than Mr. Hilton, I fancy."

"I expect so, sir."

"Well, now, there's nothing here. But we detectives have to nose around everywhere. I'm sure you are terribly upset by your master's death. Everybody gives him a good word."

"Indeed, he deserved it, sir. We all liked him. He was strict but very generous."

Furneaux chatted with her while they descended the stairs and traversed devious passages till the butler's room was gained. By that time the housemaid was convinced that Mr. Furneaux was "a very nice man." When she "did" Hilton Fenley's rooms she missed the glass, but gave no heed to its absence. Who would bother about a glass in a house where murder had been done? She simply replaced it by another of the same pattern.

"May I inquire, sir," said Tomlinson, when Furneaux had washed face and hands and was seated at a table laid for two, "may I inquire if you have any preference as to a luncheon wine?"

"I think," said Furneaux with due solemnity, "that a still wine——"

"I agree with you, sir. At this time of the day a Sauterne or a Johannisberger——"

"To my taste, a Château Yquem, with that delicate flavor which leaves the palate fresh—Frenchmen call it the *sève*——"

"Sir, I perceive that you have a taste. Singularly enough, I have a bottle of Château Yquem in my sideboard."

So the meal was a success.

An under gardener lent Furneaux a bicycle. After a chat with Farrow, to whom he conveyed some sandwiches and a bottle of beer, the detective rode to Easton. He sent a rather long telegram to his own quarters, called at a chemist's, and reached the White Horse at Roxton about two o'clock.

NOW the imp of mischance had contrived that John Trenholme should hear no word of the murder until he came downstairs for luncheon after a morning's steady work.

The stout Eliza, fearful lest Mary should forestall her with the news, bounced out from the kitchen when his step sounded on the stairs.

"There was fine goin's on in the park this morning, Mr. Trenholme," she began breathlessly.

He reddened at once, and avoided her fiery eye. Of course, it had been discovered that he had watched that girl bathing. Dash it all, his action was unintentional! What a bore!

"Mr. Fenley was shot dead on his own doorstep," continued Eliza. She gave proper emphasis to the concluding words. That a man should be murdered "on his own doorstep" was a feature of the crime that enhanced the tragedy in the public mind. The shooting was bad enough in itself, for rural England is happily free from such horrors; but swift and brutal death dealt out on one's own doorstep was a thing at once monstrous and awe-compelling. Eliza, perhaps, wondered why Mr. Trenholme flushed, but she fully understood the sudden blanching of his face at her tidings, for all Roxton was shaken to its foundations when the facts slowly percolated in that direction.

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"Good Lord!" cried he. "Could that be the shot I heard?"

"He was killed at half past nine, sir."

"Then it was! A keeper heard it, too —and a policeman—our Roxton police-man."

"That would be Farrow," said Eliza. "What was *he* doin', the lazy-bones, that he couldn't catch the villain?"

"What villain?"

"The man who killed poor Mr. Fenley."

"They know who did it, then?"

"Well, no. There's all sorts o' tales flyin' about, but you can't believe any of 'em."

"But why are you blaming Farrow? He's a good fellow. He sings. No real scoundrel can sing. Read any novel, any newspaper report. 'The prisoner's voice was harsh and unmusical.' You've seen those words scores of times."

In his relief at learning that his own escapade was not published broadcast, Trenholme had momentarily forgotten the dreadful nature of Eliza's statement. She followed him into the dining-room.

"You'll be a witness, I suppose," she said, anxious to secure details of the shot-firing.

"A witness!" he repeated blankly.

"Yes, sir. There can't be a deal o' folk who heard the gun go off."

"By Jove, Eliza, I believe you're right," he said, gazing at her in dismay. "Now that I come to think of it, I am probably the only person in existence who can say where that shot came from. It was a rifle, too. I spoke of it to the keeper and Farrow."

"I was sure something would happen when I dreamed of suffrigettes this mornin'. An' that comes of playin' pranks, Mr. Trenholme. If it wasn't for that alarm clock——"

"Oh, come, Eliza," he broke in. "An alarm clock isn't a Gatling gun. Your association of ideas is faulty. There is much in common between the clatter of an alarm clock and the suffragist cause, but the ladies have promised not to endanger life, you know."

"Anyhow, Mr. Fenley is dead as a door-nail," said Eliza firmly.

"Too bad. I take back all the hard things I said about him, and I'm sure you do the same."

"Me!"

"Yes. Didn't you say all the Fenleys were rubbish? One of them, at any rate, was wrongly classified."

"Which one?"

Trenholme bethought himself in time.

"This unfortunate banker, of course," he said.

"I'd a notion you meant Miss Sylvia. She's pretty as a picter—prettier than some picters I've seen—and folk speak well of her. But she's not a Fenley."

At any other time the artist would have received that thrust *en tierce* with a *riposte*; at present, Eliza's facts were more interesting than her wit.

"Who is the lady you are speaking of?" he asked guardedly.

"Mr. Fenley's ward, Miss Sylvia Manning. They say she's rich. Pore young thing! Some schemin' man will turn her head, I'll go bail, an' all for the sake of her brass."

"Most likely a one-legged gunner, name of Jim."

"Well, it won't be a two-legged painter, name of Jack!" And Eliza bounced out.

Now, Mary of the curl papers, having occasion to go upstairs while Trenholme was eating, peeped through the open door of the room which he had converted into a studio. She saw a picture on the easel, and the insatiable curiosity of her class led her to examine it. Even a country kitchen maid came under its spell instantly. After a pause of mingled admiration and shocked prudery, she sped to the kitchen.

"Seein' is believin'," quoted Eliza, mounting the stairs in her turn. She gazed at the drawing brazenly, with hands resting on hips and head cocked sidewise like an inquisitive hen's.

"Well, I never did!" was her verdict.

Back in the kitchen again, she announced firmly to Mary—

"*I'll* take in the cheese."

She put the Stilton on the table with a determined air.

"You don't know anything about Miss Sylvia Manning, don't you?" she said, with calm guile.

"Never heard the lady's name before you mentioned it," said Trenholme.

"Mebbe not, but it strikes me you've *seen* more of her than most folk."

"Eliza," he cried, without any pretense at smiling good humor, "you've been sneaking!"

"Sneakin', you call it? I 'appened to

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pass your room, an' who could help lookin' in? I was never so taken aback in me life. You could ha' knocked me down with a feather."

"An ostrich feather with an ostrich's leg behind it," was the angry retort.

Eliza's eyes glinted with the fire of battle.

"THE shameless ways of girls nowadays!" she breathed. "To let any young man gaze at her in them sort of clothes, if you can call 'em clothes!"

"It was an accident. She didn't know I was there. Anyhow, you dare utter another word about that picture, even hint at its existence, and I'll paint you without any clothes at all. I mean that, so beware!"

"Sorry to interrupt," said a high-pitched voice from the doorway. "You are Mr. John Trenholme, I take it? May I come in? My name's Furneaux."

"Jim, of the Royal Artillery?" demanded Trenholme angrily.

"No. Charles François, of Scotland Yard."

Eliza fled, completely cowed. She began to weep, in noisy gulps.

"I've dud-dud-done it!" she explained to agitated curl papers. "That pup-pup-pore Mr. Trenholme. They've cuc-cuc-come for him. He'll be lul-lul-locked up, an' all along o' my wu-wu-wicked tongue!"

CHAPTER VII

SOME SIDE ISSUES

TRENHOLME, rather interested than otherwise, did not blanch at mention of Scotland Yard.

"Walk right in, Mr. Furneaux," he said; he had picked up a few tricks of speech from Transatlantic brethren of the brush met at Julien's. "Have you lunched?"

"Excellently," was the reply.

"Not in Roxton. I defy you to produce a cook in this village that shall compare with our Eliza of the White Horse."

"Sir, my thoughts do not dwell on viands. True, I ate with a butler, but I drank wine with a connoisseur. It was a Château Yquem of the eighties."

"Then you should be in expansive mood. Before you demand with a scowl why I shot Mr. Fenley you might tell me why the headquarters of the London Police is named Scotland Yard."

"Because it was first housed in a street of that name near Trafalgar Square. Scotland Yard was a palace at one time, built in a spirit of mistaken hospitality for the reception of prominent Scots visiting London. We entertained so many and so lavishly that 'Gang Sooth' has become a proverb beyond the Tweed."

"There is virtue, I perceive, in a bottle of Château Yquem—or was it two?"

"In one there is light, but two might produce fireworks. Now, sir, if you have finished luncheon, kindly take me to your room and show me the sketches you made this morning."

The artist raised an inquiring eyebrow.

"I have the highest respect for your profession in the abstract, but it is new to find it dabbling in art criticism," he said.

"I assure you, Mr. Trenholme, that any drawings of yours made in the neighborhood of The Towers before half past nine o'clock to-day will be most valuable pieces of evidence—if nothing more."

Though Furneaux's manner was grave as an owl's, a certain gleam in his eye gave the requisite sting to the concluding words. Trenholme, at any other time, would have delighted in him, but dropped his bantering air forthwith.

"I don't mind exhibiting my work," he said. "It will not be a novel experience. Come this way."

Watched by two awe-stricken women from the passage leading to the kitchen, the artist and his visitor ascended the stairs. Trenholme walked straight to the easel, took off the drawing of Sylvia Manning and the Aphrodite, placed it on the floor face to the wall, and staged the sketch of the Elizabethan house. Furneaux screwed his eyelids to secure a half light; then, making a cylinder of his right hand, peered through it with one eye.

"Admirable!" he said. "Corot, with some of the breadth of Constable. Forgive the comparisons, Mr. Trenholme. Of course, the style is your own, but one uses the names of accepted masters largely as adjectives to explain one's meaning. You are a true impressionist. You paint Nature as you see her, not as she is, yet your technique is superb and your observation just. For instance, every shadow in this lovely drawing shows that the hour was about eight o'clock. But, in painting figures, I have no doubt you sink the impressionist

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in the realist. . . . The other sketch, please."

"The other sketch is a mere color note for future guidance," said Trenholme offhandedly.

"It happens also to be a recognizable portrait of Miss Sylvia Manning. I'm sorry, but I must see it."

"Suppose I refuse?"

"It will be obtained by other methods than a polite request."

"I'm afraid I shall have to run the risk."

"No, you won't." And the detective's tone became eminently friendly. "You'll just produce it within the next half minute. You are not the sort of man who would care to drag a lady's name into a police-court wrangle, which can be the only outcome of present stubbornness on your part. I know you were hidden among those cedars between, say, eight o'clock and half past nine. I know that Miss Manning bathed in a lake well within your view. I know, too, that you sketched her, because I saw the canvas a moment ago—an oil, not a water color. These things may or may not be relevant to an inquiry into a crime, but they will certainly loom large in the public mind if the police have to explain why they needed a warrant to search your apartments."

Furneaux had gaged the artistic temperament accurately. Without another word of protest, Trenholme placed the disputed canvas on the easel.

"DO YOU smoke?" inquired the detective suddenly.

"Yes. What the deuce has my smoking got to do with it?"

"I fancied that, perhaps, you might like to have a pipe while I examine this gem at leisure. One does not gabble the commonplaces of life when in the presence of the supreme in art. I find that a really fine picture induces a feeling of reverence, an emotion akin to the influence of a mountain range, or a dim cathedral. Pray burn incense. I am almost tempted to regret being a non-smoker."

Trenholme had heard no man talk in that strain since last he sat outside the Café Margery and watched the stream of life flowing along the Grand Boulevard. Almost unconsciously he yielded to the spell of a familiar jargon, well knowing he had been inspired in every touch while striving frenziedly to give permanence to a fleeting vision. He filled his pipe, and surveyed the detective with a quickened interest.

Furneaux gazed long and earnestly.

"Perfect!" he murmured, after that rapt pause. "Such a portrait, too, without any apparent effort! Just compare the cold sunlight on the statue with the same light falling on wet skin. Of course, Mr. Trenholme, you'll send this to the Salon. Burlington House finds satiety in Mayors and Masters of Fox Hounds."

"Good, isn't it?" agreed Trenholme. "What a curséd spite that it must be consumed in flame!"

"But why?" cried Furneaux, unfeignedly horrified.

"Dash it all, man, I can never copy it. And you wouldn't have me blazon that girl's face in a gallery after today's tragedy!"

The detective snapped his fingers.

"Poof!" he said. "I shall have Mr. Fenley's murderer hanged long before your picture is hung. London provides one front-rank tragedy a week, but not another such masterpiece in ten years. Burn it because of a sentiment! Perish the thought!"

"If I had guessed you were coming here so promptly it would have been in ashes an hour ago," said Trenholme, grimly insistent on sacrifice.

With a disconcerting change of manner the detective promptly assumed a dryly official attitude.

"A mighty good job for you that nothing of the sort occurred," he said. "Your picture is your excuse, Mr. Trenholme. What plea could you have urged for spying on a lady in an open-air bath if deprived of the only valid one?"

"Look here!" came the angry retort. "You seem to be a pretty fair judge of a drawing, but you choose your words rather carelessly. Just now you described me as 'hidden' behind that clump of trees, and again you accuse me of 'spying.' I won't stand that sort of thing from Scotland Yard, nor from Buckingham Palace, if it comes to that."

Furneaux instantly reverted to his French vein. His shrug was eminently Parisian.

"You misunderstand me. I allege neither hiding nor spying on your part. Name of a good little gray man! The President of the Royal Academy would hide and spy for

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a month if he could palliate his conduct by that picture. But, given no picture, what is the answer? Reflect calmly, Mr. Trenholme, and you'll see that mine are words of wisdom. Burn that canvas, and you cut a sorry figure in the witness box. Moreover, suppose you treat the law with disdain, how do you propose explaining your actions to Miss Sylvia Manning?"

"In all probability, I shall never meet the lady."

"Oh, won't you, indeed! I have the honor to request you to meet her tomorrow morning by the shore of that sylvan lake at nine fifteen, sharp. And kindly bring both sketches with you. Only, for goodness' sake, keep this one covered with a waterproof wrap if the weather breaks, which it doesn't look like doing at this moment. Now, Mr. Trenholme, take the advice of a dried-up chip of experience like me, and be sensible. One word as to actualities. I'm told you didn't see anything in the park which led you to believe that a crime had been committed?"

"Not a thing. I heard the gunshot, and noted where it came from, but so far as I could ascertain, the only creatures it disturbed were some rabbits, rooks, and pheasants."

"Ah! Where did the pheasants show up?"

"Out of the wood, close to the spot where the rifle was fired."

"How many?"

"How many what?"

"Pheasants."

"A brace. They flew right across the south front of the house to a covert on the west side. Is that an important detail?"

"When you hear the evidence you may find it so," commented Furneaux. "Why do you say 'rifle?' Why not plain 'gun'?"

"Because any one who has handled both a rifle and a shotgun can recognize the difference in sound. The explosive force of the one is many times greater than that of the other."

"Are you, too, an expert marksman?"

"I can shoot a bit. Hardly an expert, perhaps, seeing that I haven't used a gun during the past five years. If you know France, Mr. Furneaux, you'll agree that British ideas of sport——"

"I do know France," broke in the detective. "There isn't a cock robin or a jenny wren left in the country. . . . As a mere formality, what magazine are you working for?"

Trenholme told him, and Furneaux hurried away, halting for an instant in the doorway to raise a warning finger.

"Tomorrow, at the cedars, nine fifteen," he said. "And, mind you, no holocausts, or you're up a gum tree. You were either painting a pretty girl or gloating over her. Prove the one and people won't think the other, which they will be only too ready to do, this being a cynical and suspicious world."

HE LEFT a bewildered artist glaring after him. Trenholme's acquaintance with the police, either of England or France, was of the slightest. Sometimes, when overexcited by the discovery of some new and entrancing upland in the domain of art, he had bought or borrowed a volume of light fiction in order to read himself to sleep, and a detective figured occasionally in such pages. Usually, the official was a pig-headed idiot, whose blunders and narrow-mindedness served as admirable whetstones for the preternaturally sharp intelligence of an amateur investigator of crime.

Trenholme, like the average reader, did not know that such self-appointed sleuths are snubbed and despised by Scotland Yard, that they seldom or never base their fantastic theories on facts, or that, in fiction, they act in a way which would entail their own speedy appearance in the dock if practised in real life. Furneaux came as a positive revelation. A small, wiry individual who looked like a comedian and spouted the truisms of the studio, a wizened little whippersnapper who put hardly one direct question to a prospective witness, but whose caustic comments had placed a new and vastly disagreeable aspect on the morning's adventure—such a man to be the representative of staid and heavy-footed Scotland Yard! Well, wonders would never cease. It was not for a bewildered artist yet to know that Furneaux's genius alone excused his eccentricities.

And he, Trenholme, was to meet the girl! He turned to the easel and looked at the picture. A few hours ago he had reviled the fate that seemed to forbid their meeting. Now he was to be brought to her, though somewhat after the fashion of a felon with gyves on his wrists, since

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Furneaux's request for the morrow's rendezvous rang ominously like a command. Indeed, indeed, it was a mad world!

At any rate, he did not, as he had intended, tear the canvas from its stretcher and apply a match to it in the grate. Thus far, then, had Furneaux's queer method been justified. He had hit on the one certain means of restraint for an act of vandalism. The picture now stood between Trenholme and the scoffing multitude. It was his buckler against the shafts of innuendo. Rather than lose it before his actions were vindicated he would suffer the depletion to the last penny of a not altogether meager bank account.

Of course, this open-souled youngster never dreamed that the detective had read his style and attributes in one lightning-swift glance of intuition. Before ever Trenholme was aware of a stranger standing in the open doorway of the dining-room Furneaux had taken his measure.

"English, a gentleman, art-trained in Paris. Thinks the loss of La Joconde a far more serious event than a revolution, and regards the Futurist school pretty much as the Home Secretary regards the militant suffragists. Knows as much about the murder as I do about the rings of Saturn. But he ought to provide a touch of humor in an affair that promises little else than heavy tragedy. And it will do Miss Sylvia Manning some good if she is made to see that there are others than Fenleys in the world. So have at him!"

While going downstairs, the detective became aware of some sniffling in the back passage. Eliza, red-eyed now from distress, stood there, dabbing her cheeks with a corner of her apron.

"Pup-pup-please, sir," she began, but quailed under a sudden and penetrating look from those beady eyes.

"Well, what is it?" inquired Furneaux.

A violent nudge from curl papers stirred the cook's wits.

"I do hope you dud-dud-didn't pay any heed to anythink I was a-sayin' of," she stammered. "Mr. Trenholme wouldn't hurt a fuf-fuf-fly. I sus-sus-saw the picter, an' was on'y a-teasin' of 'im, like a sus-sus-silly woman."

"Exactly. Yet he heaps coals of fire on your head by declaring that you are the best cook in Hertfordshire! Is that true?"

Furneaux's impish grin was a tonic in itself. Eliza dropped the apron and squared her elbows.

"I don't know about bein' the best in Hertfordshire," she cried, "but I can hold me own no matter where the other one comes from, provided we start fair."

"Take warning, then, that if I bring a man here tomorrow evening—a big man, with a round head and bulging blue eyes—a man who looks as though he can use a carving-knife with discretion—you prepare a dinner worthy of the reputation of the White Horse! In that way, and in none other, can you rehabilitate your character."

Furneaux was gone before Eliza recovered her breath. Then she turned on the kitchen maid.

"Wot was it he said about my char-acter?" she demanded warmly. "An' wot are *you* grinnin' at? If it wasn't for *your* peepin' an' pryin' I'd never ha' set eyes on that blessed picter. You go an' put on a black dress, an' do yer hair respectable, an' mind yer don't spend half an hour perkin' an' preenin' in front of a lookin'-glass."

Mary fled, and Eliza bustled into the kitchen.

"A big man, with a round head an' bulgin' blue eyes!" she muttered wrathfully. "Does he think I'm afraid of that sort of brewer's drayman, or of a little man with eyes like a ferret, either? If he does, he's very much mistaken. I don't believe he's a real 'tec. I wouldn't be a bit surprised if he wasn't a reporter. They've cheek enough for ten, as a rule. Talkin' about my char-ac-ter, an' before that hussy of a girl, too! Wait till I see him tomorrow, that's all."

MEANWHILE, Furneaux had not held the second glass of Château Yquem to the light in Tomlinson's sanctum before Winter's car was halting outside Brondesbury police station. An Inspector assured the Superintendent that a constable was on the track of Robert Fenley, and had instructions to report direct to Scotland Yard. Then Winter reëntered the car, and was driven to Headquarters.

He was lunching in his own room, frugally but well, on bread and cheese and beer, when the Assistant Commissioner came in.

"Ah, Mr. Winter," he said. "I was told you had returned. That telephone call came from a call office in Shaftesbury Avenue. A lady, name unknown, but the

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youth in charge knows her well by sight, and thinks she lives in a set of flats near by. I thought the information sufficient for your purpose, so suspended inquiries till I heard from you."

"Just what I wanted, sir," said Winter. "There may be nothing in it, but I was curious to know why Hilton Fenley took the trouble to fib about such a trivial matter. His brother, too, is behaving in a way that invites criticism. I don't imagine that either of the sons shot his father —most certainly, Hilton Fenley could not have done it, and Robert, I think, was in London at the time——"

"Dear me!" broke in the other, a man of quiet, self-contained manner, on whose lips that mild exclamation betokened the maximum of surprise. "Is there any reason whatsoever for believing that one of these young men may be a parricide?"

"So many reasons, sir, and so convincing in some respects, that the local police would be seriously considering the arrest of Robert Fenley if they had the ascertained facts in their possession."

The Assistant Commissioner sat down.

"I hear you keep a sound brand of cigars here, Mr. Winter," he said. "I've just lunched in the St. Stephen's Club, so, if you can spare the time——"

At the end of the Superintendent's recital the chief offered no comment. He arose, went to the window, and seemed to seek inspiration from busy Westminster Bridge and a river dancing in sunshine. After a long pause he turned, and threw the unconsumed half of a cigar into the fireplace.

"It's a pity to waste such a perfect Havana," he said mournfully, "but I make it a rule not to smoke while passing along the corridors. And—you'll be busy. Keep me posted."

Winter smiled. When the door had closed on his visitor he even laughed.

"By Jove!" he said to himself. "A heart to heart talk with the guv'nor is always most illuminative. Now many another boss would have said he was puzzled, or bothered, or have given me some silly advice such as that I must be discreet, look into affairs closely, and not act precipitately. Not so our excellent A. C. He's clean bowled, and admits it, without speaking a word. He's a tonic; he really is!"

He touched an electric bell. When the policeman attendant, Johnston, appeared, he asked if Detective Sergeant Sheldon was in the building, and Sheldon came. The Superintendent had met him in a Yorkshire town during a protracted and difficult inquiry into the death of a wealthy recluse; although the man was merely an ordinary constable he had shown such resourcefulness, such ability of a rare order, that he was invited to join the staff of the Criminal Investigation Department, and had warranted Winter's judgment by earning rapid promotion.

Though tall, and of athletic build, he had none of the distinctive traits of the average policeman. He dressed quietly and in good taste, and carried himself easily; a peculiarity of his thoughtful, somewhat lawyer-like face was that the left eye was noticeably smaller than the right. Among other qualifications, he ranked as the best amateur photographer in the "Yard," and was famous as a rock climber in the Lake District.

Winter plunged at once into the business in hand.

"Sheldon," he said, "I'm going out, and may be absent an hour or longer. If a telephone message comes through from Mr. Furneaux tell him I have located the doubtful call made to The Towers this morning. Have you read the report of the Fenley murder in the evening papers?"

"Yes, sir. *Is* it a murder?"

"What else could it be?"

"An extraordinary accident."

Winter weighed the point, which had not occurred to him previously.

"No," he said. "It was no accident. I incline to the belief that was the best-planned crime I've tackled during the past few years. That is my present opinion, at any rate. Now, a man from the Brondesbury police station is following one of the dead man's sons, a Mr. Robert Fenley, who bolted back to London on a motorcycle as soon as I threatened to question him.

"Robert Fenley is twenty-four, fresh-complexioned, clean-shaven, about five feet nine inches in height, stoutish, and of sporty appearance. He had his hair cut yesterday or the day before. His hands and feet are rather small. He talks aggressively, and looks what he is, a pampered youth, very much spoiled by his parents. His clothes—all that I have seen—are a motorist's overalls. If the Brondesbury man

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reports here during my absence act as you think fit. I want Robert Fenley located, followed, and watched unobtrusively, especially in such matters as the houses he visits and the people he meets. If you need help, get it."

"Till what time, sir?" was the laconic question.

"That depends. Try and 'phone me here about five o'clock. But if you are otherwise engaged let the telephone go. Should Fenley seem to leave London by the Edgeware Road, which leads to Roxton, have him checked on the way. Here is the number of his cycle," and Winter jotted a memorandum on the back of an envelope.

"What about Mr. Furneaux if I am called out almost immediately?"

"Give the message to Johnston."

THEN Winter hurried away, and, repressing the inclination to hail a taxi, walked up Whitehall and crossed Trafalgar Square *en route* to the Shaftesbury Avenue address supplied by the Assistant Commissioner.

He found a sharp-featured youth in charge of the telephone, which was lodged in an estate agent's office. The boy grinned when the Superintendent explained his errand.

"Excuse *me*," he said, with the pert assurance of the born Cockney, "but we aren't allowed to give information about customers."

"You've broken your rules already, young man," said Winter. "You answered a similar inquiry made by Scotland Yard some hours since."

"Oh, was *that* it? Gerrard rang me up, and I thought there was something funny going on. Are you from Scotland Yard, sir?"

Winter proffered a card, and the boy's eyes opened wide.

"Crikey!" he said. "I've read about you, sir. Well, I've been doing a bit of detective work of my own. At lunch time I strolled past the set of flats where I thought the lady lived, and had the luck to see her getting out of a cab at the door. I followed her upstairs, pretending I had business somewhere, and saw her go into No. Eleven. Her name is Miss Eileen Garth—at least, that's the name opposite No. Eleven in the list in the hall."

"When you're a bit older you'll make a detective," said Winter. "You've learned the first trick of the job, and that is to keep your eyes open. Now, to encourage you, I'll tell you the second. Keep your mouth shut. If this lady is Miss Garth she is not the person we want, but it would annoy her if she heard the police were inquiring about her; so here is half a crown for your trouble."

"Can I do anything else for you, sir?" came the eager demand.

"Nothing. I'm on the wrong scent, evidently, but you have saved me from wasting time. This Miss Eileen Garth is English, of course?"

"Yes, sir; very good-looking, but rather snappy."

Winter sighed.

"That just shows how easy it is to blunder," he said. "I'm looking for a Polish Jewess, whose chief feature is her nose, and who wears big gold earrings."

"Oh, Miss Garth is quite different," said the disappointed youth. "She's tall and slim—a regular dasher, big black hat, swell togs, black and white, and smart boots with white spats. She wore pearls in her ears, too, because I noticed 'em."

Winter sighed again.

"Another half day lost," he murmured, and went out.

Knowing well that the boy would note the direction he took, he turned away from the block of flats and made for Soho, where he smoked a thin, raffish Italian cigar with an Anarchist of his acquaintance who kept a restaurant famous for its *risotto*. Then, by other streets, he approached Gloucester Mansions, and soon was pressing the electric bell of No. Eleven.

"Miss Garth in?" he said to an elderly, hatchet-faced woman who opened the door.

"Why do you want Miss Garth?" was the non-committal reply, given in the tone of one who meant the stranger to understand that he was not addressing a servant.

"I shall explain my errand to the lady herself," said Winter civilly. "Kindly tell her that Superintendent Winter, of the Criminal Investigation Department, Scotland Yard, wishes to see her."

To him it was no new thing that his name and description should bring dismay, even terror, to the cheeks of one to whom he made himself known professionally, but unless he was addressing some desperate criminal, he did not expect to be assaulted.

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For once, therefore, he was thoroughly surprised when a bony hand shot out and pushed him backward; the door was slammed in his face; the latch clicked, and he was left staring at a small brass plate bearing the legend: "Ring. Do not knock."

Naturally, this bold maneuver could not have succeeded had he a right of entry. A woman's physical strength was unequal to the task of disturbing his burly frame, and a foot thrust between door and jamb would have done the rest. As matters stood, however, he was obliged to abandon any present hope of an interview with the mysterious Miss Eileen Garth.

He remained stock still for some seconds, listening to the retreating footsteps of the strong-minded person who had beaten him. It was his habit to visualize for future reference the features and demeanor of people in whom he was interested, and of whom circumstances permitted only the merest glimpse. This woman's face had revealed annoyance rather than fear. "Scotland Yard" was not an ogre but a nuisance. She held, or, at any rate, she had exercised, a definite power of rejecting visitors whom she considered undesirable. Therefore, she was a relative, probably Eileen Garth's mother or aunt.

Eileen Garth was "tall and slim," "good-looking, but rather snappy." Well, twenty years ago, the description would have applied to the woman he had just seen. Her voice, heard under admittedly adverse conditions, was correct in accent and fairly cultured. Before the world had hardened it its tones might have been soft and dulcet. But above all, there was the presumable discovery that Eileen Garth was as decidedly opposed as Robert Fenley to full and free discussion of that morning's crime.

"Furneaux will jeer at me when he hears of this little episode," thought Winter, smiling as he turned to descend the stairs. Furneaux did jeer, but it was at his colleague's phenomenal luck.

THE door of No. Twelve, the only other flat on the same landing, opened, and a man appeared. Recognition was prompt on Winter's side.

"Hello, Drake!" he said genially. "Are *you* Signor Maselli? Well met, anyhow! Can you give me a friendly word?"

The occupant of flat No. Twelve, an undersized, slightly built man of middle age, seemed to have received the shock of his life. His sallow-complexioned face assumed a greenish-yellow tint, and his deep-set eyes glistened like those of a hunted animal.

"Friendly?" he contrived to gasp, giving a ghastly look over his shoulder to ascertain whether any one in the interior of the flat had heard that name "Drake."

"Yes. I mean it. Strictly on the q. t.," said Winter, sinking his voice to a confidential pitch. Signor Giovanni Maselli, since that was the name modestly displayed on No. Twelve's card in the hall beneath, closed the door carefully. He appeared to trust Winter, up to a point, but evidently found it hard to regain self-control.

"Not here!" he whispered. "In five minutes—at the Regency Café, Piccadilly. Let me go alone."

Winter nodded, and the other darted downstairs. The detective followed slowly. Crossing the street at an angle, he looked up at the smoke-stained elevation of Gloucester Mansions.

"A well filled nest," he communed, "and a nice lot of prize birds in it, upon my word!"

The last time he had set eyes on a certain notably expert forger and counterfeiter a judge was passing sentence on a felon of five years' penal servitude and three years' police supervision; and the judge had not addressed the prisoner as Giovanni Maselli, but as John Christopher Drake!

CHAPTER VIII

COINCIDENCES

WINTER was blessed with an unfailing memory for dates and faces. Before he had emerged from the main exit of Gloucester Mansions he had fixed Drake as committed from the Old Bailey during the Summer assizes four years earlier, released from Portland on ticket of leave at the beginning of the current year, and marked in the "failure to report" list.

"Poor devil!" he said to himself. "The very man for my purpose!"

Therefore, seeing his way clearly, his glance was not so encouraging nor his voice so pleasant when he found the ex-convict awaiting him in the Regency Café. Nevertheless, obeying the curious code which links the police and noted criminals in a sort of

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camaraderie, he asked the man what he would drink, and ordered cigarettes as well.

"Now, Maselli," he said, when they were seated at a marble-topped table in a corner of a well filled room, "since we know each other so well we can converse plainly, eh?"

"Yes, sir, but I'm done for now. I've been trying to earn an honest living, and have succeeded, but now——"

The man spoke brokenly. His spirit was crushed. He saw in his mind's eye the frowning portals of a convict settlement, and heard the boom of a giant knocker reverberating through gaunt aisles of despair.

"If you reflect that I am calling you Maselli, you'll drink that whisky and soda, and listen to what I have to say," broke in Winter severely.

The other looked up at him, and a gleam of hope illumined the pallid cheeks. He drank eagerly, and lighted a cigarette with trembling fingers.

"If only I am given a chance——" he began, but the detective interfered again.

"If only you would shut up!" he said emphatically. "I want your help, and I'm not in the habit of rewarding my assistants by sending them back to prison."

Maselli (as he may remain in this record) was so excited that he literally could not obey.

"I've cut completely adrift from the old crowd, sir," he pleaded wistfully. "I'm an engraver now, and in good work. Heaven help me, I'm married, too. She doesn't know. She thinks I was stranded in America, and that I changed my name because Italians are thought more of than Englishmen in my line."

"Giovanni Maselli, may I ask what you are talking about?" said Winter, stiffening visibly.

At last the hunted and haunted wretch persuaded himself that "the Yard" meant to be merciful. Tears glistened in his eyes, but he finished the whisky and soda and remained silent.

"Good!" said Winter more cheerfully. "I sha'n't call you Maselli again if you don't behave. Now, how long have you lived in Gloucester Mansions?"

"Four months, sir. Ever since my marriage."

Winter smiled. The man had gone straight from the gates of Portland to some woman who was waiting for him! He was an old offender, but had proved slippery as an eel—hence a stiff sentence when caught; but penal servitude had conquered him.

"Has Miss Eileen Garth lived in No. Eleven during those four months?" was the next question.

"Yes, sir—two years or more, I believe. Her mother mentioned something of it to my wife one day."

"Her mother? Same name?"

"Yes, Mrs. Garth."

"How do they live?"

"The daughter was learning to be a stage dancer; but they've come into a settled income, and that idea is given up."

"Any male relations?"

"None that I know of, sir. Eileen is engaged to be married. I haven't heard the gentleman's name, but I've seen him scores of times."

"Scores of times—in four months?"

"Yes, sir, every second or third day. That is, I either meet him or know he is there because Mrs. Maselli and Mrs. Garth are friendly, and there is constant coming and going across the landing."

"Is he a man of about thirty, middle height, lanky black hair, smooth dark face, sunken eyes, high cheek bones—rather, shall I say, Italian in appearance?"

Maselli was surprised, and showed it.

"Why, sir, you've described him to a nicety," he said.

"Very well. Next time he is there to your absolute knowledge, slip out and telephone the fact to me at Scotland Yard. If I'm not in, ask for Mr. Furneaux. You remember Mr. Furneaux?"

A sickly smile admitted the acquaintance. Furneaux had recognized the same artist's hand in each of many realistic forgeries, and it was this fact which led to the man's capture and conviction.

"If neither of us is at home, inquire for Mr. Sheldon," went on Winter. "Note him. He's a stranger to you. If you fail to get hold of any of us, say simply that Signor Maselli would like to have a word at our convenience. It will be understood. We sha'n't bother you. Give another call next time the visitor is in Mrs. Garth's flat, and keep on doing this until you find one of the three on the line. Don't use the telephone in Shaftesbury Avenue near the Mansions, because the boy in charge there might be suspicious, and blab. That is all. You are not doing Mrs. Garth or her daughter an ill

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turn, so far as I can judge. Keep a still tongue. Silence on your part will meet with silence on mine. . . Oh, dash it, have another drink! Where's your nerve?"

Signor Giovanni Maselli was crying. A fantom had brushed close, but was passing; nevertheless, its shadow had chilled him to the bone.

WINTER walked back to Scotland Yard, and found that Sheldon had gone, leaving a note which read: "Mr. Robert Fenley is at 104, Hendon Road, Battersea Park." He was tempted to have a word with Furneaux, but forebore, and tackled some other departmental business. It was a day fated, however, to evolve the unexpected. About a quarter to four the telephone bell rang, and Maselli informed him that Miss Garth's fiancé had just arrived at Gloucester Mansions.

"Excellent," said Winter. "In future, devote your energies to legitimate engraving. Good-by!"

He rushed out and leaped into a taxi; within five minutes he was at the door of No. Eleven once more. Let it not be imagined that he had not weighed the possible consequences of thrusting himself in this fashion into Hilton Fenley's private affairs. Although the man had summoned the assistance of Scotland Yard to elucidate the mystery of his father's death, that fact alone could not secure him immunity from the law's all-embracing glance. Winter agreed with Furneaux that the profession of a private banker combined with company promotion is too often a cloak for roguery in the City of London, and the little he knew of the Fenley history did not tend to dissipate a certain nebulous suspicion that their record might not be wholly clean.

The theft of the bonds had been hushed up in a way that savored of unwillingness on Mortimer Fenley's part to permit the police to take action. The man's tragic death might well be a sequel to the robbery, and, granted the impossibility of his elder son having committed the murder, there was nothing fantastic in the notion that he might be a party to it.

Again, Hilton Fenley had deliberately misled Scotland Yard in regard to the seemingly trivial incident of the telephone call. Had he told the truth, and grumbled at the lack of discretion on some woman's part in breaking in on a period of acute distress in the household, Winter's subsequent discovery would have lost its point. As matters stood, however, it was one of a large number of minor circumstances which demanded full examination, and the Superintendent decided that the person really responsible for any seeming excess of zeal on his part should be given an opportunity to clear the air in the place best fitted for the purpose; namely, the address from which the call emanated.

Therefore, when the door was opened again by Mrs. Garth, she found that the Napoleonic tactics of an earlier hour were no longer practicable, for the enemy instantly occupied the terrain by leaning inward.

"I want to see Mr. Hilton Fenley," he said suavely. "You know my name already, Mrs. Garth, so I need not repeat it."

The sharp-featured woman was evidently sharp-witted also. Finding that the door might not be closed, she threw it wide.

"I have no objection to your seeing Mr. Fenley," she said. "I am at a loss to understand why you follow him here, but that does not concern me in the least. Come this way."

Latching the door, she led him to a room on the right of the entrance hall, which formed the central artery of the flat. The place had no direct daylight. At night, when an electric lamp was switched on, its contents would be far more distinct than at this hour, when the only light came from a transverse passage at the end, or was borrowed through any door that happened to remain open. Still, Winter could use his eyes, even in the momentary gloom, and he used them so well on this occasion that he noted two trunks, one on top of the other, and standing close to the wall.

They were well plastered with hotel and railway labels, and when a flood of light poured in from the room to which Mrs. Garth ushered him, he deciphered two of the freshest, and presumably the most recent. They were "Hotel d'Italie, Rue Caumartin, Paris," and a baggage number, "517." Not much, perhaps, in the way of information, but something; and Winter could trust his memory.

He found himself in a well furnished room, and hoped that Mrs. Garth might leave him there, even for a few seconds, when he would be free to examine the apartment without her supervision. But she treated him as

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if he might steal the spoons. Remaining in the doorway, she called loudly:

"Mr. Fenley! The person I told you of is here again. Will you kindly come? He is in the dining-room."

A door opened, a hurried step sounded on a linoleum floor-covering, and Hilton Fenley appeared.

"Mr.—Mr. Winter, isn't it?" he said, with a fine air of surprise.

"Yes," said the Superintendent composedly. "You hardly expected to meet me here, I suppose?"

"Well, Mrs. Garth mentioned your earlier visit, but I am at a loss to understand——"

"Oh, it is easily explained. We of the Yard take nothing for granted, Mr. Fenley. I learned by chance that a young lady who lives here rang you up at Roxton this morning, and knowing that you took the trouble to conceal the fact, I thought it advisable——"

MRS. GARTH was a woman of discretion. She closed the door on the two men. Fenley did not wait for Winter to conclude.

"That was foolish of me, I admit," he said, readily enough. "One does not wish all one's private affairs to be canvassed, even by the police. The moment Mrs. Garth mentioned your name I saw my error. You checked the telephone calls to The Towers, I suppose, and thus learned I had misled you."

"Something of the sort. Miss Garth is a lady not difficult of recognition."

"She and her mother are very dear friends. It was natural they should be shocked by the paragraphs in the newspapers and wish to ascertain the truth."

"Quite so. I'm sorry if my pertinacity has annoyed them, or you."

"I think they will rather be pleased by such proof of your thoroughness. Certainly I, for my part, do not resent it."

"Very well, sir. Since I am here, I may inquire if you know any one living at 104, Hendon Road, Battersea Park?"

"Now that you mention the address, I recall it as the residence of the lady in whom my brother is interested. This morning I had forgotten it, but you have refreshed my memory."

"You're a tolerably self-possessed person," was the detective's unspoken thought, for Fenley was a different man now from the nervous, distrait son who had clamored for vengeance on his father's murderer. "You own up to the facts candidly when it is useless to do anything else, and you never fail to hammer a nail into Robert's coffin when the opportunity offers."

But aloud he said—

"You really don't know the lady's name, I suppose?"

Fenley hesitated a fraction of a second.

"Yes, I do know it, though I withheld the information this morning," he replied. "But, I ask you, is it quite fair to make me a witness against my brother?"

"Some one must explain Mr. Robert's movements, and, since he declines the task, I look to you," was the straightforward answer.

"She is a Mrs. Lisle," said Fenley, after another pause—a calculated pause this time.

"Have you visited your City office today?"

"I went straight there from The Towers. I told you I was going there. What object could I have in deceiving you?"

"None that I can see, Mr. Fenley. But I have been wondering if any new light has been shed on the motive which might have led to the crime. Have you examined Mr. Mortimer Fenley's papers, for instance? There may be documents, letters, memoranda secreted in some private drawer or despatch case."

The other shook his head. He appeared not to resent the detective's tone. It seemed as if regret for the morning's lack of confidence had rendered him apologetic.

"No," he said. "I have not had time yet to go through my father's papers. This afternoon I was taken up wholly with business. You see, Mr. Winter, I can not allow my personal suffering to cost other men thousands of pounds, and that must be the outcome if certain undertakings now in hand are not completed. But my father was most methodical, and his affairs are sure to be thoroughly in order. Within the next few days, when I have time to make a proper search, I'll do it. Meanwhile, I can practically assure you that he had no reason to anticipate anything in the nature of a personal attack from any quarter whatsoever."

"Do you care to discuss your brother's extraordinary behavior?"

"In what respect?"

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"Well, he virtually bolted from Roxton today, though I had warned him that his presence was imperative."

"My brother is self-willed and impetuous, and he was dreadfully shocked at finding his father dead."

"Did he tell you he meant returning to London at once?"

"No. When I came downstairs, after the distressing scene with Mrs. Fenley, he had gone."

The Superintendent was aware already that he was dealing with a man cast in no ordinary mold, but he did not expect this continued meekness. Ninety-nine people out of a hundred would have grown restive under such cross-examination, and betrayed their annoyance by word or look; not so Hilton Fenley, who behaved as if it were the most natural thing in the world that he should be tracked to his friends' residence and made to explain his comings and goings during the day. Swayed by a subconscious desire to nettle his victim into protest, Winter tried a new tack.

"I suppose, Mr. Fenley, you have seen your father's solicitors today?" he said suddenly.

"If you mean that question in the ordinary sense, I must tell you that my father employed no firm of solicitors for family purposes. Of course, at one time or another, he has availed himself of the services of nearly every leading firm of lawyers in the City, but each transaction was complete in itself. For instance, his will is a holograph will, if that is what you are hinting at. He told me its provisions at the time it was signed and witnessed, and I shall surely find it in his private safe at the office."

"You have not looked for it today?"

"No. Why should I?"

FEELING distinctly nonplussed, for there was no denying that Fenley had chosen the best possible way of carrying off a delicate situation, Winter turned, walked slowly to a window and gazed down into the street. He was perturbed, almost irritated, by a novel sense of failure not often associated with the day's work. He had to confess now that he had made no material stride in an inquiry the solution of which did not seem, at the outset, to offer any abnormal difficulty.

True, there were circumstances which might serve to incriminate Robert Fenley; but if that young man were really responsible for the crime, he was what "the Yard" classes privately as a monumental idiot, since his subsequent conduct was well calculated to arouse the suspicion which the instinct of self-preservation would try to avert. A long experience of the methods of criminals warned Winter of the folly of jumping at conclusions, but he would be slow to admit and hard to be convinced that Robert Fenley took any active part in his father's murder.

Of course it was not with a view toward indulging in a reverie that he approached the window. He was setting a simple trap, into which many a man and woman had fallen. Any one of moderately strong character can control face and eyes when the need of such discipline is urgent, but howsoever impregnable the mask, the strain of wearing it is felt, and relief shows itself in an unguarded moment. At the farther end of the room there was a mirror above the fireplace, and as he turned his back on Fenley, by a hardly perceptible inclination of his head he could catch the reflection of his companion's face.

The maneuver succeeded, but its result was negative. Hilton Fenley's eyes were downcast. He had lifted a hand to his chin in one of those nervous gestures which had been so noticeable during the morning's tumult. His face wore an expression of deep thought. Indeed, he might be weighing each word he had heard and uttered, and calculating its effect on his own fortunes.

Still obeying that unworthy instinct which bade him sting Fenley into defiance, Winter tossed a question over his shoulder.

"May I have a word with Miss Garth?" he said suddenly.

"Why?" was the calm answer.

"Just to settle that telephone incident once and for all."

"But if you imagine it might not have been Miss Garth who made the call, why are you here?"

Then the detective laughed. His wonted air of cheerful good humor smoothed the wrinkles from his forehead. He was beaten, completely discomfited, and he might as well confess it and betake himself to some quarter where a likelier trail could be followed.

"True," he said affably. "I need not bother the young lady. Perhaps you will

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make my excuses and tell her that I ran you to earth in Gloucester Mansions merely to save time. By the way, I led the youth at the call office to believe that I was searching for an undersized Polish Jewess, all nose and gold earrings, a description which hardly applies to Miss Garth. And one last question—do you return to Roxton tonight?"

"Within the hour."

So Winter descended the stone stairs a second time, a prey to a feeling of failure. What had he gained by his impetuous actions? He had ascertained that Hilton Fenley was on terms of close intimacy with a pretty girl and her mother. Nothing very remarkable in that. He had secured a Paris address and the number of a baggage registration label. But similar information might be gleaned from a hundred thousand boxes and portmanteaux in London that day. He had been told that Mortimer Fenley had made a holograph will. Such procedure was by no means rare. Millions sterling have been disposed of on half sheets of note paper. Even his Majesty's judges have written similar wills, and blundered, with the result that a brother learned in the law has had to decide what the testator really meant. He wondered whether or not Mortimer Fenley had committed some technical error, such as the common one of creating a trust without appointing trustees. That would be seen in due course, when the will was probated.

At any rate, he grinned at his own expense.

"The only individual who has scored today," he said to himself, "is John Christopher Drake, alias Giovanni Maselli. I must keep mum about him. By gad, I believe I've compounded a felony!"

But because he had not scored inside Gloucester Mansions there was no valid reason why he should not accomplish something in their immediate neighborhood. For instance, who and what were the Garths, mother and daughter? He looked in on a well known dramatic agent, and raised the point. Reference to a ledger showed that Eileen Garth, age eighteen, tall, good-looking, no previous experience, had been a candidate for musical comedy, London engagement alone accepted; the almost certain sequel being that she had kept her name six months on the books without an offer to secure her valuable services.

"I remember the girl well," said the agent. "She had the makings of a coryphée, but lacked training. She could sing a little, so I advised her to take dancing lessons. I believe she began them, with a teacher I recommended, but I've seen nothing of her for a year or more."

"Again has Giovanni filled the bill," mused Winter as he made for his office. "I wish now I had curbed my impulsiveness and kept away from Gloucester Mansions—the second time, anyhow."

Though chastened in spirit, the fact that no news of any sort awaited him at Scotland Yard did not help to restore his customary poise.

"Dash it all!" he growled. "I'm losing grip. The next thing I'll hear is that Sheldon is enjoying himself at Earl's Court and that Furneaux has gone out fishing."

RESTLESS and ill at ease, he decided to ring up The Towers, Roxton. A footman answered the telephone, and announced that Mr. Furneaux had "just come in."

"Hello, Charles," said Winter, when a thin voice squeaked along the line. "Any luck?"

"Superb!"

"Good! I've drawn blanks, regular round O's, except three probably useless addresses."

"Addresses are never useless, friend. The mere knowing of a number in a street picks out that street from all the other streets where one knows no numbers."

"Tell me things, you rat, if conditions permit."

"Well, I've hit on two facts of profound importance. First, Roxton contains an artist of rare genius, and, second, it holds a cook of admitted excellence."

"Look here——"

"I'm listening here, which is all that science can achieve at present."

"I'm in no mood for ill timed pleasantries."

"But I'm not joking, 'pon me honor. The cook, name of Eliza, does really exist, and is sworn to surprise even your jaded appetite. The artist is John Trenholme. In years to come you'll boast of having met him before he was famous."

"So you, like me, have done nothing?"

"Ah, I note the bitterness of defeat in your tone. It has warped your judgment,

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too, as you will agree when a certain dinner I have arranged for tomorrow night touches the spot."

"Can't you put matters more plainly?"

"I'm guessing and planning and contriving. Like Galileo, I am convinced that the world moves." Then Furneaux broke into French. "Regarding those addresses you speak of, what are they?"

Using the same language, Winter told him, substituting "the Eurasian" and "the motorcyclist" for names, and adding that he was writing Jacques Faure, the Paris detective, with reference to the hotel and the label, the figures on the latter being of the long, thin, French variety.

"Are you coming here tonight?" went on Furneaux.

"Do you want me?"

"I'm only a little chap, and I'd like to have you near when it is dark."

Winter sighed, but it was with relief. He knew now that Furneaux had not failed.

"Very well," he said. "I'll arrive by the next convenient train."

"The point is," continued Furneaux, who delighted in keeping his chief on tenterhooks when some new development in the chase was imminent, "that the position here requires handling by a man of your weight and authority. The motorcyclist came back an hour ago, and is now walking in the garden with the girl."

"The deuce! Why hasn't Sheldon reported?" blurted out Winter.

"Because, in all likelihood, he is watching the other girl. Isn't that what you were doing? Isn't half the battle won when we find the woman?"

"I haven't set eyes on *my* woman."

"You surprise me. That kind of modest self-effacement isn't your usual style, at all at all, as they say in Cork."

"Probably you're right about Sheldon. He is a worker, not a talker like some people I know," retorted Winter.

"What very dull acquaintances you must possess! Workers are the small fry who put spouters into Parliament, and pay them £400 a year, and make them Cabinet Ministers."

"Evidently things have happened at Roxton, or you wouldn't be so chirpy. Well, so long! See you later."

Having ascertained that an express train was timed to leave St. Pancras for Roxton at six P. M., he was packing a suitcase when a telegram arrived. It had been handed in at Folkestone at four thirty, and read:

> Decided to follow lady instead of motor cyclist. Will explain reasons verbally. Reaching London seven o'clock. SHELDON.

"I'm the only one of the three who has accomplished nothing," was Winter's rueful comment. Nor could any critic have gainsaid him, for he seemed to have been wasting precious hours while his subordinates were making history in the Fenley case.

He left instructions with Johnston that Mr. Sheldon was to write fully, care of the Roxton police station, and took a cab for St. Pancras. He was passing along the platform when he caught sight of Hilton Fenley seated on the far side of a first-class carriage, which was otherwise untenanted. An open despatch box lay beside him, and he was so engrossed in the perusal of some document that he gave no heed to externals. Winter threw wide the door, and entered.

"We are fated to meet today, Mr. Fenley," he said pleasantly. "First, you send for me; then I hunt you, and now we come together by chance. I don't think coincidence can arrange any fourth way of bringing us in touch today."

But he was mistaken. Coincidence had already done far more than he imagined in providing unseen clues to the ultimate clearing up of a ghastly crime, and the same subtle law of chance was fated to assist the authorities once more before the sun rose again over the trees from whose cover Mortimer Fenley's murderer had fired the fatal shot.

CHAPTER IX

WHEREIN AN ARTIST BECOMES A MAN OF ACTION

FURNEAUX'S visit left Trenholme in no happy fame of mind. The man who that morning had not a care in the world was now a prey to disquieting thought. The knowledge that he had been close to the scene of a dastardly murder at the moment it was committed, that he was in a sense a witness of the crime, was depressing in itself, for his was a kindly nature; and the mere fact that circumstances had rendered him impotent when his presence might have acted as a deterrent was saddening.

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Then, again, he was worried by the reflection that, no matter how discriminating the police might prove with regard to his sketch of Sylvia Manning, he would undoubtedly be called as a witness, both at the inquest and at the trial of any person arrested for the crime. It was asking too much of editorial human nature to expect that the magazine which had commissioned the illustrated article on Roxton would not make capital of the fact that its special artist was actually sketching the house while Mr. Fenley's murderer was skulking among the trees surrounding it. Thus there was no escape for John Trenholme. He was doomed to become notorious. At any hour the evening newspapers might be publishing his portrait and biography!

On going downstairs he was cheered a little by meeting an apologetic Eliza.

"I hope I didn't do any reel 'arm, sir," she said, dropping an aspirate in sheer emphasis.

"Any harm to whom, or what?" he asked.

"By talkin' as I did afore that 'tec, sir."

"All depends on what you said to him. If you told him, for instance, that I carry Browning pistols in each pocket, and that my easel is a portable Maxim gun, of course——"

"Oh, sir, I never try to be funny. I mean about the picter."

"Good Heavens! You, too!"

Eliza failed to understand this, but she was too subdued to inquire his meaning.

"You see, sir, he must ha' heered what I said about it, an' him skulkin' there in the passage. Do you reelly think a hop-o'-me-thumb like that can be a Scotland Yard man? It's my belief he's a himpostor."

It had not dawned on Trenholme that Furneaux's complete fund of information regarding the sketches had been obtained so recently. He imagined that Police Constable Farrow and Gamekeeper Bates had supplied details, so his reply cheered Eliza.

"Don't worry about unnecessary trifles," he said. "Mr. Furneaux is not only a genuine detective, but a remarkably clever one. You ought to have heard him praising the picture you despised."

"I never did," came the vehement protest. "The picter is fine. It was the young lady's clothes, or the want of 'em, that I was condemnin'."

"I've seen four thousand ladies walking about the sands at Trouville in far scantier attire."

"That's in France, isn't it?" inquired Eliza.

"Yes, but France is a more civilized country than England."

Eliza sniffed, sure sign of battle.

"Not it," she vowed. "I've read things about the carryin' on there as made me blood boil. Horse-racin' on Sundays, an' folks goin' to theaters instead of church. France more civilized than England, indeed! What'll you be sayin' next?"

"I'll be saying that if our little friend behaves himself I shall ask him to dine here tomorrow."

"He's axed himself, Mr. Trenholme, an' he's bringing another one, a big fellow, who knows how to use a carvin'-knife, he says. What would you like for dinner?"

Trenholme fled. That question was becoming a daily torment. The appearance of Furneaux had alone saved him from being put on the culinary rack after luncheon; having partaken of one good meal, he never had the remotest notion as to his requirements for the next.

He wandered through the village, calling at a tobacconist's, and looking in on his friend the barber. All tongues were agog with wonder. The Fenley family, known to that district of Hertfordshire during the greater part of a generation, was subjected to merciless criticism. He heard gossip of Mr. Robert, of Mr. Hilton, even of the recluse wife, now a widow; but every one had a good word for "Miss Sylvia."

"We don't see enough of her, an' that's a fact," said the barber. "She must find life rather dull, cooped up there as she is, for all that it's a grand house an' a fine park. They never had company like the other big houses. A few bald-headed City men an' their wives for an occasional week end in the Summer or when the coverts were shot in October—never any nice young people. Miss Sylvia wept when the rector's daughter got married last year, an' well I knew why—she was losin' her only chum."

"Surely there are scores of good families in this neighborhood?"

"Plenty, sir, but nearly all county. The toffs never did take on the Fenleys, an', to be fair, I don't believe the poor man who's dead ever bothered his head about them."

"But Miss Manning can not have lived here all her life? She must have been abroad, at school, for instance?"

"Well, yes, sir. I remember her comin'

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home from Brussels two years ago. But school ain't society. The likes of her, with all her money, should mix with her own sort."

"Is she so wealthy, then?"

"She's Mr. Fenley's ward, an' the servants at The Towers say she'll come in for a heap when she's twenty-one, which will be next year."

Somehow, this item of gossip, confirming Eliza's statement, was displeasing. Sylvia Manning, nymph of the lake, receded to some dim altitude where the high and mighty are enthroned. Biting his pipe viciously, Trenholme sought the solitude of a woodland footpath, and tried to find distraction in studying the effects of diffused light.

Returning to the inn about tea time, he was angered anew by a telegram from the magazine editor. It read:

News in Pictures wants sketches and photographs of Fenley case and surroundings. Have suggested you for commission. Why not pick up a tenner? Rush drawings by train.

"That's the last straw," growled Trenholme fiercely. He raced out, bought a set of picture postcards, showing the village and the Tudor mansion, and despatched them to the editor of *News in Pictures* with his compliments. Coming back from the station, he passed the Easton lodge of The Towers. A daring notion seized him, and he proceeded to put it into practise forthwith. He presented himself at the gate, and was faced by Mrs. Bates and a policeman. Taught by experience to beware of strangers that day, the keeper's wife gazed at him through an insurmountable iron palisade. The constable merely surveyed him with a professional air, as one who would interfere if needful.

"I am calling on Miss Sylvia Manning," announced Trenholme promptly.

"By appointment, sir?"

"No, but I have reason to believe that she would wish to see me."

"My orders are that nobody is to be admitted to the house without written instructions, sir."

"How can Miss Manning give written instructions unless she knows I am here?"

"Them's my orders," said Mrs. Bates firmly.

"But," he persisted, "it really amounts to this—that you decide whether or not Miss Manning wishes to receive me, or any other visitor."

Mrs. Bates found the point of view novel. Moreover, she liked this young man's smile. She hesitated, and temporized.

"If you don't mind waitin' a minute till I telephone——" she said.

"Certainly. Say that Mr. John Trenholme, who was sketching in the park this morning, asks the favor of a few words."

The guardian of the gate disappeared; soon she came out again, and unlocked the gate.

"Miss Manning is just leavin' the house," she said. "If you walk up the avenue you'll meet her, sir."

NOW, it happened that Trenholme's request for an interview reached Sylvia Manning at a peculiar moment. She had been shocked and distressed beyond measure by the morning's tragedy. Mortimer Fenley was one of those men whom riches render morose, but his manner had always been kind to his ward. A pleasant fiction enabled the girl to regard Mr. and Mrs. Fenley as her "uncle" and "aunt," and the tacit relationship thus established served to place the financier and his "niece" on a footing of affectionate intimacy. Of late, however, Sylvia had been aware of a splitting up of the family into armed camps, and the discovery, or intuition, that she was the cause of the rupture had proved irksome and even annoying.

Mortimer Fenley had made no secret of his desire that she should marry his younger son. When both young people, excellent friends though they were, seemed to shirk the suggestion, though by no means actively opposing it, Fenley was angered, and did not scruple to throw out hints of coercion. Again, the girl knew that Hilton Fenley was a rival suitor, and meant to defy his father's intent with regard to Robert. Oddly enough, neither of the young men had indulged in overt love-making. According to their reckoning, Sylvia's personal choice counted for little in the matter. Robert seemed to assume that his "cousin" was merely waiting to be asked, while Hilton's attitude was that of a man biding his time to snatch a prize when opportunity served.

Sylvia herself hated the very thought of matrimony. The only married couples of her acquaintance were either hopelessly

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detached, like Fenley and his wife, or uninteresting people of the type which the village barber had etched so clearly for Trenholme's benefit. Whatsoever quickening of romance might have crept into such lives had long yielded to atrophy. Marriage, to the girl's imaginative mind, was synonymous with a dull and prosy middle age. Most certainly the vague day dreams evoked by her reading of books and converted into alluring vistas by an ever-widening horizon were not sated by the prospect of becoming the wife of either of the only two young men she knew.

There was a big world beyond the confines of Roxton Park. There were interests in life that called with increasing insistence. In her heart of hearts she had decided, quite unmistakably, to decline any matrimonial project for several years, and while shrinking from a downright avowal of her intentions, which her "uncle" would have resented very strongly, the fact that father and sons were at daggers drawn concerning her was the cause of no slight feeling of dismay, even of occasional moments of unhappiness.

She had no one to confide in. For reasons beyond her ken Mortimer Fenley had set his face against any of her school friends being invited to the house, while Mrs. Fenley, by reason of an unfortunate failing, was a wretched automaton that ate and drank and slept, and alternated between brief fits of delirium and prolonged periods of stupor induced by drugs.

Still, until a merciless gunshot had torn away the veil of unreality which enshrouded the household, Sylvia had contrived to avoid a crisis. All day, during six days of the week, she was free in her own realm. She had books and music, the woods, the park, and the gardens to occupy busy hours. Unknown to any, her favorite amusement was the planning of extensive foreign tours by such simple means as an atlas and a set of guide books. She had a talent for sketching in water color, and her own sanctum contained a dozen or more copious records of imaginary journeys illustrated with singular accuracy of detail.

She was athletic in her tastes, too. She had fitted up a small gymnasium, which she used daily. At her request, Mortimer Fenley had laid out a nine-hole links in the park, and in her second golfing year (the current one) Sylvia had gone around in bogey. She would have excelled in tennis, but Robert Fenley was so much away from home that she seldom got a game, while Hilton professed to be too tired for strenuous exercise after long days in the City. She could ride and drive, though forbidden to follow any of the local packs of foxhounds, and it has been seen that she was a first-rate swimmer. Brodie, too, had taught her to drive a motor car, and she could discourse learnedly on silencers and the Otto cycle.

ON THE whole, then, she was content, and hugged the conceit that when she came of age she would be her own mistress and order her life as she chose. The solitary defect of any real importance in the scheme of things was Mortimer Fenley's growing insistence on her marriage to Robert.

It was astounding, therefore, and quite bewildering, that Robert Fenley should have hit on the day of his father's death to declare his prosaic passion. He had motored back from London about four o'clock. Hurrying to change his clothing for the attire demanded by convention in hours of mourning, he sent a message to Sylvia asking her to meet him at tea. Afterward he took her into the garden, on the pretext that she was looking pale and needed fresh air. There, without the least preamble, he informed her that the day's occurrences had caused him to fall in unreservedly with his father's wishes. He urged her to agree to a quiet wedding at the earliest possible date, and pointed out that a prompt announcement of their pact would stifle any opposition on Hilton's part.

Evidently he took it for granted that if Barkis was willing, Peggotty had no option in the matter. He forgot to mention such a trivial element as love. Their marriage had been planned by the arbiter of their destinies, and who were they that they should gainsay that august decision? Why, his father's death had made it a duty that they owed to the other's memory!

Though Sylvia's experience of the world was slight, and knowledge of her fellow creatures rather less, Cousin Robert's eagerness, as compared with his deficiencies as a wooer, warned her that some hidden but powerful motive was egging him on now. She tried to temporize, but the more she eluded him the more insistent he became.

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At last, she spoke plainly, and with some heat.

"If you press for my answer today it is 'No,'" she said, and a wave of color flooded her pale cheeks. "I think you can hardly have considered your actions. It is monstrous to talk of marriage when my uncle has only been dead a few hours. I refuse to listen to another word."

Perforce, Robert had left it at that. He had the sense to bottle up his anger, at any rate in her hearing; perhaps he reflected that the breaking of the ice would facilitate the subsequent plunge.

Far more disturbed in spirit than her dignified repulse of Fenley had shown, Sylvia reëntered the house, passing the odd-looking little detective as she crossed the hall. She took refuge in her own suite, but determined forthwith to go out of doors again and seek shelter among her beloved trees. Through a window, as her rooms faced south, she saw Robert Fenley pacing moodily in the garden, where he was presently joined by the detective.

Apparently, Fenley was as ungracious and surly of manner as he knew how to be, but Furneaux continued to chat with careless affability; soon the two walked off in the direction of the lake. That was Sylvia's chance. She ran downstairs and was at the door when a footman came and said that Mrs. Bates wanted her on the telephone.

At first she was astounded by Trenholme's message. Then sheer irritation at the crassness of things, and perhaps some spice of feminine curiosity, led her to give the order which opened the gates of Roxton Park to a man she had never seen.

The two met a few hundred yards down the avenue. Police Constable Farrow, who had been replaced by another constable while he went home for a meal, was on guard in the Quarry Wood again until the night men came on duty, and noticed Miss Manning leaving the house. He descended from his rock and strolled toward the avenue, with no other motive than a desire to stretch his legs; his perplexity was unbounded when he discovered Mortimer Fenley's ward deep in conversation with the artist.

"Well, I'm jiggered!" he said, dodging behind a giant rhododendron. Whipping out a notebook and consulting his watch, he solemnly noted time and names in a laboriously accurate roundhand. Then he nibbled his chin strap and dug both thumbs into his belt. His luck was in that day. He knew something now that was withheld from the Scotland Yard swells. Sylvia Manning and John Trenholme were acquaintances. Nay, more; they must be old friends; under his very eyes they went off together into the park.

Back to his rock went Police Constable Farrow, puzzled but elated. Was he not a repository of secrets? And that funny little detective had betaken himself in the opposite direction! Fate was kind indeed.

He would have been still more surprised had Fate permitted him to be also an eavesdropper, if listeners ever do drop from eaves.

SYLVIA was by no means flurried when she came face to face with Trenholme. The female of the species invariably shows her superiority on such occasions. Trenholme knew he was blushing and rather breathless. Sylvia was cool and distant.

"You are Mr. Trenholme, I suppose?" she said, her blue eyes meeting his brown ones in calm scrutiny.

"Yes," he said, trying desperately to collect his wits. The well balanced phrases conned while walking up the avenue had vanished in a hopeless blur at the instant they were needed. His mind was in a whirl.

"I am Miss Manning," she continued. "It is hardly possible to receive visitors at the house this afternoon, and as I happened to be coming out when Mrs. Bates telephoned from the lodge, I thought you would have no objection to telling me here why you wish to see me."

"I have come to apologize for my action this morning," he said.

"What action?"

"I sketched you without your knowledge, and of course without your permission."

"You sketched me? Where?"

"When you were swimming in the lake."

"You didn't dare!"

"I did. I'm sorry now, though you inspired the best picture I have ever painted, or shall ever paint."

For an instant Sylvia forgot her personal troubles in sheer wonderment, and a ghost of a smile brightened her white cheeks. John Trenholme was a person who inspired confidence at sight, and her first definite

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emotion was one of surprise that he should look so disconsolate.

"I really don't understand," she said. "The quality of your picture has no special interest for me. What I fail to grasp is your motive in trespassing in a private park and watching me, or any lady, bathing."

"Put that way, my conduct needs correcting with a horsewhip; but happily there are other points of view. That is—I mean—— Really, Miss Manning, I am absurdly tongue-tied, but I do beg of you to hear my explanation."

"Have you one?"

"Yes. It might convince any one but you. You will be a severe judge, and I hardly know how to find words to seek your forgiveness, but I—I was the victim of circumstances."

"Please don't regard me as a judge. At present, I am trying to guess what happened."

Then John squared his shoulders and tackled the greatest difficulty he had grappled with for years.

"The simple truth should at least sound convincing," he said. "I came to Roxton three days ago on a commission to sketch the village and its environment. This house and grounds are historical, and I applied for permission to visit them, but was refused. By chance, I heard of a public footpath which crosses the park close to the lake——"

Sylvia nodded. She, too, had heard much of that footpath. Its existence had annoyed Mortimer Fenley as long as she could remember anything. That friendly little nod encouraged Trenholme. His voice came under better control, and he contrived to smile.

"I was told it was a bone of contention," he said, "but that didn't trouble me a bit, since the right of way opened the forbidden area. I meant no disturbance or intrusion. I rose early this morning, and would have made my sketches and got away without seeing you if it were not for a delightful pair of wrought iron gates passed *en route*. They detained me three quarters of an hour. Instead of reaching the clump of cedars at a quarter to seven or thereabouts, I arrived at half past seven.

"I sketched the house and lawns and then turned to the lake. When you appeared I imagined at first you were coming to pitch into me for entering your domain. But, as I was partly hidden by some briers beneath the cedars, you never saw me, and before I realized what was taking place, you threw off your wraps and were in the water."

"Oh!" gasped Sylvia.

"Now, I ask you to regard the situation impersonally," said Trenholme, sinking his eyes humbly to the ground and keeping them there. "I had either to reveal my presence and startle you greatly, or remain where I was and wait until you went off again.

"Whether it was wise or not, I elected for the easier course. I think I would act similarly if placed in the like predicament tomorrow or next day. After all, there is nothing so very remarkable in a lady taking a morning swim that an involuntary onlooker should be shocked or scandalized by it. You and I were strangers to each other. Were we friends, we might have been swimming in company."

Sylvia uttered some incoherent sound, but Trenholme, once launched in his recital, meant to persevere with it to the bitter end.

"I still hold that I chose the more judicious way out of a difficult situation," he said. "Had I left it at that, all would have been well. But the woman tempted me, and I did eat."

"Indeed, the woman did nothing of the sort," came the vehement protest.

"I speak in the artistic sense. You can not imagine, you will never know, what an exquisite picture you and the statue of Aphrodite made when mirrored in that shining water. I forgot every consideration but the call of art, which, when it is genuine, is irresistible, overwhelming. Fearing only that you might take one plunge and go, I grabbed my palette and a canvas and began to work.

"I used pure color, and painted as one reads of the fierce labor of genius. For once in my life I was inspired. I had caught an effect which I might have sought in vain during the remainder of my life. I painted real flesh, real water. Even the reeds and shrubs by the side of the lake were veritable glimpses of actuality. Then, when I had given some species of immortality to a fleeting moment, you returned to the house, and I was left alone with a dream made permanent, a memory transfixed on canvas, a picture which would have created a sensation in the Salon——"

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"OH, SURELY, you would not exhibit me—it——" breathed the girl.

"No," he said grimly. "That conceit is dead and buried. But I want you to realize that during those few minutes I was not John Trenholme, an artist struggling for foothold on the steep crags of the painter's rock of endeavor, but a master of the craft gazing from some high pinnacle at a territory he had won. If you know anything of painting, Miss Manning, you will go with me so far as to admit that my indiscretion was impersonal. I, a poet who expressed his emotions in terms of color, was alone with Aphrodite and a nymph, on a June morning, in a leafy English park. I don't think I should be blamed, but envied. I should not be confessing a fault, but claiming recognition as one favored of the gods."

Trenholme was speaking in earnest now, and Sylvia thrilled to the music of his voice. But if her heart throbbed and a strange fluttering made itself felt in her heart, her utterance, by force of repression, was so cold and unmoved that Trenholme became more downcast than ever.

"I do paint a little," she said, "and I can understand that the—er—statue and the lake offered a charming subject; but I am still at a loss to know why you have thought fit to come here and tell me these things."

"It is my wretched task to make that clear, at least," he cried contritely, forcing himself to turn and look through the trees at a landscape now glowing in the mellow light of a declining sun. "When you had gone I sat there, working hard for a time, but finally yielding to the spell of an unexpected and, therefore, a most delightful romance. A vision of rare beauty had come into my life and gone from it, all in the course of a magic hour. Is it strange that I should linger in the shrine?

"I was aroused by a gunshot, but little dreamed that grim Death was stalking through Fairyland. Still, I came to my everyday senses, packed up my sketches and color box, and tramped off to Roxton, singing as I went. Hours afterward, I learned of the tragedy which had taken place so near the place where I had snatched a glimpse of the Hesperides. It was known that I had been in the park at the time. I had met and spoken to Bates, your head keeper, and the local policeman, Farrow.

"A detective came, a man named Furneaux; a jolly, clever chap, too, but a most disturbing reasoner. He showed me that my drawings—the one sketch, at any rate, which I held sacred—would prove my sheet anchor when I was brought into the stormy waters of inquests and law courts. It is obvious that every person who was in that locality at half past nine this morning must explain his or her presence beyond all doubt or questioning. I shall be obliged to say, of course, that I was in the park fully two hours, from seven thirty A. M. onward. What was I doing? Painting. Very well; where is the result? Is it such that any artist will testify that I was busily engaged? Don't you see, Miss Manning? I must either produce that sketch or stand convicted of the mean offense you yourself imputed to me instantly when you heard of my whereabouts."

"Oh, I didn't really imply that," said Sylvia, and a new note of sympathy crept into her voice. "It would be horrid if—if you couldn't explain; and—it seems to me that the sketches—you made more than one, didn't you?—should be shown to the authorities."

Trenholme's face lit with gratitude because of her ready tact. He was sorely impelled to leave matters on their present footing, but whipped himself to the final stage.

"There is worse to come," he said miserably.

"Goodness me! What else *can* there be?"

"Mr. Furneaux has asked me—ordered me, in fact—to meet you by the side of the lake tomorrow morning at a quarter past nine and bring the drawings. Now you know why I have ventured to call this afternoon. I simply could not wait till I was brought before you like a collared thief with the loot in his possession. I *had* to meet you without the intervention of a grinning policeman. When you heard my plea I thought, I hoped, that you might incline to a less severe view than would be possible if the matter came to your notice without warning."

He stopped abruptly. A curiously introspective look had come into the girl's eyes, for he had summoned up courage to glance at her again, and snatch one last impression of her winsome loveliness before she bade him be gone.

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"Where are you staying in Roxton, Mr. Trenholme?" she asked. The unexpected nature of the question almost took his breath away.

"At the White Horse Inn," he said.

She pointed across the park.

"That farm there, Mr. Jackson's, lies nearly opposite the inn. I suppose the detective has not impounded your sketch?"

"No," he murmured, quite at a loss to follow her intent.

"Well, Mr. Jackson will let you go and come through his farmyard to oblige me. It will be a short cut for you, too. If you have no objection, I'll walk with you to the boundary wall, which you can climb easily.

"Then you might bring this debatable picture, and let me see it—the others as well, if you wish. Wouldn't that be a good idea? I mightn't get quite such a shock in the morning, when the detective man parades you before me. It is not very late. I have plenty of time to stroll that far before dinner."

Hardly believing his ears, Trenholme walked off by her side. No wonder Police Constable Farrow was surprised. And still less room was there for wonder that Hilton Fenley, driving with Winter from the station, should shout an imperative order to Brodie to stop the car when he saw the couple in the distance.

"Isn't that Miss Sylvia?" he said harshly, well knowing there could be only one answer.

"Yes, sir," said the chauffeur.

"Who is the man with her?"

"Mr. Trenholme, the artist, from the White Horse, sir."

"Are you sure?"

"Yes, sir. I've seen him several times hereabouts."

Fenley was in a rare temper already, for Winter had told him Brother Robert was at home, a development on which he had by no means counted. Now his sallow face darkened with anger.

"Drive on!" he said. "I gave orders, at your request, Mr. Winter, that no strangers were to be admitted. I must see to it that I am obeyed in future. It is surprising, too, that the police are so remiss in such an important matter."

For once, Winter was perforce silent. In his heart of hearts he blamed Detective Inspector Furneaux.

CHAPTER X

FURNEAUX STATES SOME FACTS AND CERTAIN FANCIES

THIS record of a day remarkable beyond any other in the history of secluded Roxton might strike a more cheerful note if it followed the two young people across the park. It is doubtful whether or not Sylvia Manning's unpremeditated action in accompanying Trenholme was inspired by a sudden interest in art or by revolt against the tribulations which had befallen her. Of course there is some probability that a full and true account of the conversation between man and maid as they walked the half mile to Jackson's farm might throw a flood of light on this minor problem. Be that as it may, stern necessity demands that the chronicle should revert for a time to the sayings and doings of the Fenleys and the detectives.

Despite a roundabout route, Furneaux had merely led Robert Fenley through the gardens to the Quarry Wood. Somewhat to the detective's surprise, the rock was unguarded. The two were standing there, discussing the crime, when Police Constable Farrow returned to his post. Furneaux said nothing—for some reason he did not emphasize the fact to his companion that a sentry should have been found stationed there—but a sharp glance at the policeman warned the latter that he ran considerable risk of a subsequent reprimand.

Conscious of rectitude, Farrow saluted, and produced his notebook.

"I've just made a memo of this, sir," he said, pointing to an entry,

Furneaux read:

Miss Sylvia Manning left home 6.45 P. M. Met Mr. John Trenholme, artist, White Horse Inn, in avenue 6.47 P. M. The two held close conversation, and went off together across park in direction of Roxton 6.54 P. M. Lady wore no hat. Regarded incident as unusual, so observed exact times.

"I note what the Inspector says, and will discuss the point later," said Furneaux, returning the book. The policeman grinned. As between Scotland Yard and himself a complete understanding was established.

"Have the local police discovered anything of importance?" inquired Fenley, who, now that his own affairs called for no immediate attention, seemed to give more heed to the manner of his father's death.

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At first, his manner to Furneaux had been churlish in the extreme. Evidently he thought he could treat the representative of the Criminal Investigation Department just as he pleased. At this moment he elected to be gruffly civil in tone.

"They are making full inquiries, of course," replied the detective, "but I think the investigation will be conducted in the main by my Department—— As I was saying, Mr. Fenley, undoubtedly the shot was fired from this locality. Dr. Stern, who is an authority on bullet wounds, is convinced of that, even if there was no other evidence, such as the chauffeur's and the artist's I told you of, together with the impressions formed by Bates and others."

"Were there no footprints?" was the next question, and Fenley eyed the ground critically. He deemed those Scotland Yard Johnnies thick-headed chaps, at the best.

"None of any value. Since ten o'clock, however, dozens of new ones have been made. That is why the policeman is keeping an eye on the place—chiefly to warn off intruders. Shall we return to the house?"

"It's a strange business," said Fenley, striding down the slope by Furneaux's side. "Why in the world should any one want to shoot my poor old guv'nor? He was straight as a die, and I don't know a soul who had any real grievance against him."

Furneaux did not appear to be listening. The two were approaching the patch of moist earth which bore the impress of Robert Fenley's boots. "By the way," he said suddenly, "are you aware that there is a sort of a theory that your father was shot by a rifle belonging to you?"

"What?" roared the other, and it was hard to say whether rage or astonishment predominated in his voice. "Is that one of Hilton's dodges to get me into trouble?"

"But you do own an Express rifle, which you keep in your sitting-room. Where is it now?"

"In the place where it always is. Standing in a corner behind the bookcase."

"When did you see it last, Mr. Fenley?"

"How the deuce do I know? I give it a run through with an oiled rag about once a month. It must be nearly a month since I cleaned it."

"It has gone."

"Gone where?"

"I wish I knew."

"But who the devil could have taken it?"

IF EVER a man was floundering in a morass of wrath and amazement it was this loud-voiced youngster. He was a slow-witted lout, but the veriest dullard must have perceived that the disappearance of the weapon which presumably killed his father was a serious matter for its owner.

In order to grasp this new phase of the tragedy in its proper bearings he stood stock still, and gazed blankly into the serious face of the detective. Furneaux knew he would do that. It was a mannerism. Some men can not think and move at the same moment, and Robert Fenley was one.

Naturally, young Fenley did not know that he was leaving a new set of footprints by the side of the others already attributed to him. Having done that, he was no longer wanted.

"We'll solve every part of the puzzle in time," said Furneaux slowly, moistening his thin lips with his tongue as if he were about to taste another glass of rare old-vintage wine.

"I mentioned the fact of the gun being missing to show you how unwise you were this morning. You shouldn't have bolted off as you did when Mr. Winter requested you to remain. I haven't the least doubt, Mr. Fenley, that you can prove you were in London at the time the murder was committed, and during some days prior to it, but the police like these matters to be cleared up; if I may give you a hint, you'll tell the Superintendent that you regret your behavior, and show you mean what you say by giving him all the information he asks for. Here he is now. I hear Mr. Hilton's car, and Mr. Winter is coming with him from town."

"Mr. Hilton's car? It's no more his car than mine. You mark my words, there will be trouble in the family if my brother starts bossing things. He hates me, and would do me an ill turn if he could. Was it Hilton who spread this story about my gun?"

"No. Rather the reverse. He kept your name studiously out of it."

"Who was it, then? I have a right to know."

"I fail to recollect just how the matter cropped up. It was the direct outcome of the common observation of several persons who heard the report, and who were able to discriminate between one class of gun and another. Anyhow, there is no occasion

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for you to squeal before you are hurt. You acted like a fool this morning. Try and behave yourself more reputably now."

The prophet Balaam was not more taken aback when rebuked by his ass than Robert Fenley when Furneaux turned and rent him in this fashion. Hitherto the detective's manner had been mildness itself, so this change of front was all the more staggering.

"Oh, I say!" came the blustering protest. "I don't allow any of you fellows to talk to me like that. I——"

"You'll hear worse in another second if you really annoy me," said Furneaux. "Heretofore no one seems to have troubled to inform you what a special sort of idiot you are. Though your last words to your father were a threat that you were inclined to shoot him and your precious self, when you saw him lying dead you thought of nothing but your own wretched follies, and bolted off to Hendon Road, Battersea, instead of remaining here and trying to help the police.

"When I tell you your gun is missing you yelp about your brother's animosity. Before your father is laid in his grave you threaten to upset the household because your brother acts as its master. Why shouldn't he? Are you fitted to take the reins or share his responsibility? If you were at your right job, Robert Fenley, you'd be carrying bricks and mortar in a hod; for you haven't brains enough to lay a brick or use a trowel."

The victim of this outburst thought that the little detective had gone mad, though the reference to Hendon Road had startled him, and a scared expression had come into his eyes.

"Look here——" he began, but Furneaux checked him again instantly.

"I've looked at you long enough to sum you up as a sulky puppy," he said. "If you had any sort of gumption you would realize that you occupy a singularly precarious position. Were it not for the lucky accident that my colleague and I were on the spot this morning it is more than likely that the county police would have arrested you at sight. Don't give us any more trouble, or you'll be left to stew in your own juice. I have warned you, once and for all. If you care to swallow your spleen and amend your manners, I shall try to believe you are more idiot than knave. At present I am doubtful which way the balance tips."

Furneaux stalked off rapidly, leaving the other to fume with indignation as he followed. With his almost uncanny gift of imaginative reasoning, the Jersey man had guessed the purport of Fenley's talk with Sylvia in the garden. He had watched the two from a window of the dining-room, and had read correctly the girl's ill concealed scorn, not quite devoid of dread, as revealed by face and gesture. To make sure, he waylaid her in the hall while she was hurrying to her own apartments. Then he sauntered after Robert Fenley, and only bided his time to empty upon him the vials of his wrath.

He had taken the oaf's measure with a nice exactitude. To trounce him without frightening him also was only inviting a complaint to the Commissioner, but Furneaux was well aware that the longer Robert Fenley's dull brain dwelt on the significance of that address in Battersea being known to the police, the less ready would he be to stir a hornets' nest into activity by showing his resentment. Obviously, Furneaux's methods were not those advocated in the Police Manual. Any other man who practised them would risk dismissal, but the "Little 'Un" of the Yard was a law unto himself.

Meanwhile, he was hurrying after the "Big 'Un," (such, it will be recalled, were the respective nicknames Furneaux and Winter had received in the Department) who had alighted from the car, and was listening to Hilton Fenley berating a servant for having permitted Trenholme to make known his presence to Miss Manning. The man, however, protested that he had done nothing of the sort. Miss Sylvia had been called to the lodge telephone, and the footman's acquaintance with the facts went no farther. Smothering his annoyance as best he could, Fenley rang up Mrs. Bates and asked for particulars. When the woman explained what had happened, he rejoined Winter in the hall, paying no heed to Furneaux, who was entering at the moment.

"THAT artist fellow who was trespassing in the park this morning—if nothing worse is proved against him—must have a superb cheek," he said angrily. "He actually had the impertinence to ask Miss Manning to meet him, no doubt

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offering some plausible yarn as an excuse. I hope you'll test his story thoroughly, Mr. Winter. At the least, he should be forced to say what he was doing in these grounds at such an unusual hour."

"He is putting himself right with Miss Manning now," broke in Furneaux.

"Putting himself right with Miss Manning? What the deuce do you mean, sir?" Fenley could snarl effectively when in the mood, and none might deny his present state of irritation, be the cause what it might.

"That young lady is the only person to whom he owes an explanation. He is giving it to her now."

"Will you kindly be more explicit?"

Furneaux glanced from his infuriated questioner to Winter, his face one note of mild interrogation and non-comprehension.

"Really, Mr. Fenley, I have said the same thing in two different ways," he cried. "As a rule I contrive to be tolerably lucid in my remarks—don't I, Mr. Robert?" for the younger Fenley had just come in.

"What's up now?" was Robert's non-committal answer.

For some reason his brother did not reply, but Furneaux suddenly grew voluble.

"Of course, you haven't heard that an artist named Trenholme was painting near the lake this morning when your father was killed," he said. "Fortunately, he was there before and after the shot was fired. He can prove, almost to a yard, the locality where the murderer was concealed. In fact, he is coming here tomorrow, at my request, to go over the ground with me.

"An interesting feature of the affair is that Mr. Trenholme is a genius. I have never seen better work. One of his drawings, a water color, has all the brilliancy and light of a David Cox, but another, in oil, is a positive masterpiece. It must have been done in a few minutes, because Miss Manning did not know he was sitting beneath the cedars, and it is unreasonable to suppose that she would preserve the same pose for any length of time—sufficiently long, that is——"

"Did the bounder paint a picture of Sylvia bathing?" broke in Robert, his red face purple with rage.

"Allow me to remind you that you are speaking of a painter of transcendent merit," said Furneaux suavely.

"When *I* meet him I'll give him a —— good hiding."

"He's rather tall and strongly built."

"I don't care how big he is, I'll down him."

"Oh, stop this pothouse talk," put in Hilton, giving the blusterer a contemptuous glance. "Mr. Furneaux, you seem primed with information. Why should Mr. Trenholme, if that is his name, have the audacity to call on Miss Manning? He might have the impudence to skulk among the shrubs and watch a lady bathing, but I fail to see any motive for his visit to The Towers this evening."

Furneaux shook his head. Evidently the point did not appeal to him.

"There is no set formula that expresses the artistic temperament," he said. "The man who passes whole years in studying the nude is often endowed with a very high moral sense. Mr. Trenholme, though carried away by enthusiasm this morning, may be consumed with remorse tonight if he imagines that the lady who formed the subject of his sketch is likely to be distressed because of it.

"I fear I am to blame. I stopped Mr. Trenholme from destroying the picture today. He meant burning it, since he had the sense to realize that he would be summoned as a witness, not only at tomorrow's inquest, but when the affair comes before the courts. I was bound to point out that the drawings supplied his solitary excuse for being in the locality at all. He saw that —unwillingly, it is true, but with painful clearness—so I assume that his visit to Miss Manning was expiatory, a sort of humble obeisance to a goddess whom he had offended unwittingly. I assume, too, that his plea for mercy has not proved wholly unsuccessful, or Miss Manning would not now be walking with him across the park."

"What!" roared Robert. He turned to the gaping footman, for the whole conversation had taken place in the hall. "Which way did Miss Sylvia go?" he cried.

"Down the avenue, sir," said the man. "I saw Miss Sylvia meet the gentleman, and after some talk they went through the trees to the right."

Robert raced off. Winter, who had not interfered hitherto, because Furneaux always had a valid excuse for his indiscretions, made as if he would follow and restrain the younger Fenley; but Furneaux

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caught his eye and winked. That sufficed. The Superintendent contented himself with gazing after Robert Fenley, who ran along the avenue until clear of the Quarry Wood, when he, too, plunged through the line of elms and was lost to sight.

Hilton watched his impetuous brother with a brooding underlook. He still held in his hand a leather portfolio bulging with papers, some of which he had placed there when Winter opened the door of the railway coach in St. Pancras station. The footman offered to relieve him of it, but was swept aside with a gesture.

"I HAVE never known Robert so excited and erratic in his movements as he has been today," he said at last. "I hope he will not engage in a vulgar quarrel with this Mr. Trenholme, especially in Miss Manning's presence."

Apparently he could not quite control his voice, in which a sense of unctuous amusement revealed itself. Furneaux could not resist such an opportunity. He had pierced Robert's thick skin; now he undertook a more delicate operation.

"That would be doubly unfortunate," he said, chuckling quietly. "If I am any judge of men, Mr. Robert Fenley would meet more than his match in our artist friend, while he would certainly undo all the good effect of an earlier and most serious and convincing conversation with the young lady."

Hilton swung around on him.

"When did my brother return from London?" he asked.

"Shortly before five o'clock. He and Miss Manning had tea together, and afterward strolled in the gardens. I don't wonder at any artist wishing to sketch Miss Manning. Do you? If I may be allowed to say it, I have never seen a more graceful and charming girl."

"May I inquire if you have made any progress in the particular inquiry for which I brought you here?"

Hilton Fenley spoke savagely. He meant to be offensive, since the innuendo was unmistakable. Apparently Furneaux's remarks had achieved some hypodermic effect.

"Oh, yes," was the offhand answer. "I have every reason to believe that Mr. Winter and I will make an arrest without undue loss of time."

"I am glad to hear it. Thus far your methods have not inspired the confidence I, as a member of the public, was inclined to repose in Scotland Yard. I am going to my rooms now, and dine at a quarter to eight. About nine o'clock I wish to go into matters thoroughly with Mr. Winter and you. At present, I think it only fair to say that I am not satisfied with the measures, whatever they may be, you have seen fit to adopt."

He seemed to await a retort, but none came, so he strode across the hall and hurried up the stairs. Furneaux continued to gaze blankly down the long, straight avenue, nor did he utter a word till a door opened and closed on the first floor in the southeast corner.

Then he spoke.

"Some people are very hard to please," he said plaintively.

Winter beckoned to the footman.

"Do you mind asking Mr. Tomlinson if he can come here for a moment?" he said. When the man disappeared he muttered—

"Why are you stroking everybody's fur the wrong way, Charles?"

"A useful simile, James. If they resemble cats we may see sparks, and each of those young men has something of the tiger in him."

"But things have gone horribly wrong all day—after a highly promising start, too. I don't see that we are any nearer laying hands on a murderer because we have unearthed various little scandals in the lives of Mortimer Fenley's sons. And what game are you playing with this artist, Trenholme?"

"The supremely interesting problem just now is the game which he is playing with Robert Fenley. If that young ass attacks him he'll get the licking he wants, and if you're in any doubt about my pronouns——"

"Oh, dash you and your pronouns! Here's Tomlinson. Quick! Have you a plan of any sort?"

"Three! Three separate lines of attack, each deadly. But there are folk whose mental equipment renders them incapable of understanding plain English. Now, my friend Tomlinson will show you what I mean. I'll ask him a simple question, and he will give you a perfect example of a direct answer. Tomlinson, can you tell me what the extrados of a voussoir is?"

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"No, Mr. Furneaux, I can not," said the butler, smiling at what he regarded as the little man's humor.

"There!" cried Furneaux delightedly. "Ain't I a prophet? No evasions about Tomlinson, are there?"

"I think you're cracked," growled Winter, picking up his suitcase. "If I'm to stay here tonight, I shall want a room of some sort. Mr. Tomlinson, can you——"

"Share mine," broke in Furneaux. "I'm the quietest sleeper living. Our friend here is sure to have at disposal a room with two beds in it."

"The principal guest room is unoccupied," said the butler.

"Where is it?"

"On the first floor, sir, facing south."

"Couldn't be better. The very thing. Ah! Here comes my baggage." And the others saw a policeman bicycling up the avenue, with a small portmanteau balanced precariously between the handle bars and the front buttons of his tunic.

"You gentlemen will dine in my room, I hope?" said Tomlinson, when he had escorted them upstairs.

"We are not invited to the family circle, at any rate," said Winter.

"Well, you will not suffer on that account," announced Tomlinson genially. "Of course, I shall not have the pleasure of sharing the meal with you, but dinner will be served at a quarter to eight. Mr. Furneaux knows his way about the house, so, with your permission, I'll leave you at present. If you're disengaged at nine thirty I'll be glad to see you in my sanctum."

"ISN'T he a gem?" cried Furneaux, when the door had closed, and he and Winter were alone.

Winter sat down on the side of a bed. He was worried, and did not strive to hide it. For the first time in his life he felt distrustful of himself, and he suspected, too, that Furneaux was only covering abject failure by a display of high spirits.

"Why so pensive an attitude, James?" inquired the other softly. "Are you still wondering what the extrados of a voussoir is?"

"I don't care a tuppenny——what it is."

"But that's where you're wrong. That's where you're crass and pig-headed. The extrados of a voussoir——"

"Oh, kill it, and let it die happy——"

"—Is the outer curve of a wedge-shaped stone used for building an arch. Now, mark you, those are words of merit. Wedge, arch—wedges of fact which shall construct the arch of evidence. We'll have our man in the dock across that bridge before we are much older."

"Confound it, how? He couldn't be in his bedroom and in the Quarry Wood, four hundred yards away, at one and the same moment."

Furneaux gazed fixedly at his friend's forehead, presumably the seat of reason.

"Sometimes, James, you make me gasp with an amazed admiration," he cooed. "You do, really. You arrive at the same conclusion as I, a thinker, without any semblance of thought process on your part. How do you manage it? Is it through association with me? You know, there's such a thing as inductive electricity. A current passing through a highly charged wire can excite another wire, even a common iron one, without actual contact."

"I've had a rotten afternoon, and don't feel up to your far-fetched jokes just now; so if you have nothing to report, shut up," said the Superintendent crossly.

"Then I'll cheer your melancholy with a bit of real news brightened by imagination," answered Furneaux promptly. "Hilton Fenley couldn't have fired the rifle himself, except by certain bizarre means which I shall lay before the court later; but he planned and contrived the murder, down to the smallest detail. He wore Brother Robert's boots when available; from appearances Brother Robert is now wearing the identical pair which made those footprints we saw, but I shall know in the morning, for that fiery young sprig obligingly left another well marked set of prints in the same place twenty minutes ago. When circumstances compelled Hilton to walk that way in his own boots, he slipped on two roughly made moccasins, which he burned last night, having no further use for them. Therefore, he knew the murder would take place this morning.

"I've secured shreds of the sacking out of which he made the pads to cover his feet; and an under gardener remembers seeing Mr. Hilton making off with an empty potato sack one day last week, and wondering why he wanted it. During some mornings recently Hilton Fenley breakfasted early and went out, but invariably

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had an excuse for not accompanying his father to the City. He was then studying the details of the crime, making sure that an expert, armed with a modern rifle, could not possibly miss such a target as a man standing outside a doorway, and elevated above the ground level by some five feet or more.

"No servant could possibly observe that Mr. Hilton was wearing Mr. Robert's boots, because they do not differ greatly in size; but, luckily for us, a criminal always commits an error of some sort, and Hilton blundered badly when he made those careful imprints of his brother's feet, as the weather has been fine recently, and the only mud in this locality lies in that hollow of the Quarry Wood. It happens that some particles of that identical mud were embedded in the carpet of Hilton Fenley's sitting-room. I'm sorry to have to say it, because the housemaid is a nice girl."

"Never mind the housemaid. Go on."

"Exactly what the housemaid would remark if she heard me; only she would giggle, and you look infernally serious. Next item: Hilton Fenley, like most high-class scoundrels, has the nerves of a cat, with all a cat's fiendish brutality. He could plan and carry out a callous crime and lay a subtle trail which must lead to that cry baby, Robert, but he was unable to control his emotions when he saw his father's corpse. That is where the murderer nearly always fails. He can never picture in death that which he hated and doomed in life. There is an element in death——"

"Chuck it!" said Winter unfeelingly.

Furneaux winced, and affected to be deeply hurt.

"THE worst feature of service in Scotland Yard is its demoralizing effect on the finer sentiments," he said sadly. "Men lose all human instincts when they become detectives or newspaper reporters. Now the ordinary policeman ofttimes remains quite soft-hearted. For instance, Police Constable Farrow, though preening himself on being the pivot on which this case revolves, was much affected by Hilton Fenley's first heart-broken words to him. 'Poor young gentleman,' said Farrow, when we were discussing the affair this afternoon, 'he was cut up somethink orful. I didn't think he had it in him, s'elp me, I didn't. Tole me to act for the best. Said some one had fired a bullet which nearly tore his father to pieces.'

"There was more of the same sort of thing, and I got Farrow to jot down the very words in his notebook. Of course, he doesn't guess why. . . . Now, I wonder how Hilton Fenley knew the effect of that bullet on his father's body. The doctor had not arrived. There had been only a superficial examination by Tomlinson of the orifice of the wound. What other mind in Roxton would picture to itself the havoc caused by an expanding bullet? The man who uttered those words *knew* what sort of bullet had been used. He *knew* it would tear his father's body to pieces. A neurotic imagination was at work, and that cry of horror was the soul's unconscious protest against the very fiendishness of its own deed. . . .

"Oh, yes. Let these Fenleys quarrel about that girl, and we'll see Hilton marching steadily toward the Old Bailey. Of course, we'll assist him. We'll make certain he doesn't deviate or falter on the road. But he'll follow it, and of his own accord; and the first long stride will be taken when he goes to the Quarry Wood to retrieve the rifle which lies hidden there."

Winter whistled softly. Then he looked at his watch.

"By Jove! Turned half past seven," he said.

"Ha!" cackled Furneaux. "James is himself again. We have hardly a scrap of evidence, but that doesn't trouble our worthy Superintendent a little bit, and he'll enjoy his dinner far better than he thought possible ten minutesa go. *Sacré nom d'une pipe!* By the time you've tasted a bottle out of Tomlinson's favorite bin you'll be preparing a brief for the Treasury solicitor!"

CHAPTER XI

SOME PRELIMINARY SKIRMISHING

NOW, perhaps, taking advantage of an interval while the representatives of Scotland Yard sought the aid of soap and water as a preliminary to a meal, it is permissible to wander in the gloaming with Sylvia Manning and her escort. To speak of the gloaming is a poetic license, it is true. Seven o'clock on a fine Summer evening in England is still broad daylight, but daylight of a quality that lends itself admirably to

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the exigencies of romance. There is a species of dreaminess in the air. The landscape assumes soft tints unknown to a fiery sun. Tender shadows steal from undiscovered realms. It is permissible to believe that every night on Parnassus is a night in June.

At first these two young people were at a loss to know what to talk about. By tacit consent they ignored the morning's tragedy, yet they might not indulge in the irresponsible chatter which would have provided a ready resource under normal conditions. Luckily Trenholme remembered that the girl said she painted.

"It is a relief to find that you also are of the elect," he said. "An artist will look at my pictures with the artist's eye. There are other sorts of eyes—Eliza's, for instance. Do you know Eliza, of the White Horse?"

Sylvia collected her wits, which were wool-gathering.

"I think I have met her at village bazaars and tea fights," she said. "Is she a stout, red-faced woman?"

"Both, to excess; but her chief attribute is her tongue, which has solved the secret of perpetual motion. Had it kept silent even for a few seconds at lunch time today, that sharp-eyed and rabbit-eared detective would never have known of the second picture—your picture—because I can eke out my exhibits by a half finished sketch of the lake and a pencil note of the gates. But putting the bits of the puzzle together afterwards, I came to the conclusion that Mary, our kitchen maid, passed my room, saw the picture on the easel and was scandalized. She of course told Eliza, who went to be shocked on her own account, and then came downstairs and pitched into me. At that moment the Scotland Yard man turned up."

"Is it so very—dreadful, then?"

"Dreadful! It may fall far short of the standard set by my own vanity; but given any sort of skill in the painter, how can a charming study of a girl in a bathing costume, standing by the side of a statue of Aphrodite, be dreadful? Of course, Miss Manning, you can hardly understand the way in which a certain section of the public regards art. In studio jargon we call it the 'Oh, ma!' crowd, that being the favorite exclamation of the young ladies who peep and condemn. These people are the hopeless Philistines who argue about the sex of angels, and demand that nude statues shall be draped. But my picture must speak for itself. Tell me something about your own work. Are you taking up painting seriously?"

Now, to be candid, Sylvia herself was not wholly emancipated from the state of Philistinism which Trenholme was railing at. Had he been less eager to secure a favorable verdict, or even less agitated by the unlooked-for condescension she was showing, he would have seen the absurdity of classing a girl of twenty with the lovers of art for art's sake, those earnest-eyed enthusiasts who regard a perfect curve or an inimitable flesh tint as of vastly greater importance than the squeamishness of the young person. Painters have their limitations as well as Mrs. Grundy, and John Trenholme did not suffer a fool gladly.

Sylvia, however, had the good sense to realize that she was listening to a man whose finer instincts had never been trammeled by conventions which might be wholesome in an academy for young ladies. Certainly she wondered what sort of figure she cut in this much debated picture, but that interesting point would be determined shortly. Meanwhile she answered demurely enough:

"I'm afraid you have taken me too seriously. I have hardly progressed beyond the stage where one discovers, with a sort of gasp, that trees may be blue or red, and skies green. Though I am going to look at your pictures, Mr. Trenholme, it by no means follows that I shall ever dare to show you any of mine."

"Still, I think you must have the artistic soul," he said thoughtfully.

"Why?"

"There was more than mere physical delight in your swimming this morning. You reveled in the sunlight, in the golden air, in the scents of trees and shrubs and flowering grass. First-rate swimmer as you are, you would not have enjoyed that dip half as much if it were taken in a covered bath, where your eyes dwelt only on white tiles and dressing-booths."

The girl, subtly aware of a new element in life, was alarmed by its piercing sweetness, and with ruthless logic brought their talk back to a commonplace level.

"Roxton seems to be a rather quaint place to find you in, Mr. Trenholme," she said. "How did you happen on our tiny village? Though so near London, we are

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quite a byway. Why did you pay us a visit?"

So Trenholme dropped to earth again, and they spoke of matters of slight import till the boundary wall was reached.

Sylvia hailed a man attending cattle in the farmyard, and the artist vaulted the wall, which was breast high. The girl wondered if she could do that. When opportunity served she would try. Resting her elbows on the coping-stones, she watched Trenholme as he hurried away among the buildings and made for the village. She had never before met such a man or any one even remotely like him. He differed essentially from the Fenleys, greatly as the brothers themselves differed. Without conscious effort to please, he had qualities that appealed strongly to women, and Sylvia knew now that no consideration would induce her to marry either of her "cousins."

If asked to put her thought into words, she would have boggled at the task, for intuition is not to be defined in set speech. In her own way, she had summed up the characteristics of the two men with one of whom marriage had been at least a possibility. Hilton she feared and Robert she despised, so if either was to become her husband, it would be Hilton. But five minutes of John Trenholme's companionship had given her a standard by which to measure her suitors, and both fell wofully short of its demands. She saw with startling clearness of vision that Hilton, the schemer, and Robert, the wastrel, led selfish lives. Souls they must possess, but souls starved by lack of spirtuality, souls pent in dun prisons of their own contriving.

She was so lost in thought, thought that strayed from crystal-bright imageries to nebulous shapes at once dark and terrifying, that the first intimation she received of Robert Fenley's approach was his stertorous breathing. From a rapid walk he had broken into a jog trot when he saw Trenholme vanish over the wall. Of late he seldom walked or rode a horse, and he was slightly out of condition, so his heavy face was flushed and perspiring, and his utterance somewhat labored when the girl turned at his cry:

"I say, Sylvia—you've given me such a chase! Who the deuce is that fellow, an' what are you doing here?"

Robert had appeared at an inauspicious moment. Sylvia eyed him with a new disfavor. He was decidedly gross, both in manner and language. She was sure he could not have vaulted the wall.

"I'm not aware that I called for any chasing on your part," she said, with an aloofness perilously akin to disdain.

He halted, panting, and eyed her sulkily.

"No, but dash it all! You can't go walking around with any rotten outsider who forces himself into your company," was the most amiable reply he could frame on the spur of the moment.

"You are short of breath," she said, smiling in a curiously impersonal way. "Run back to the house. It will do you good."

"All right. You run with me. The first gong will go any minute, and we've got to eat, you know, even though the pater *is* dead."

It was an unhappy allusion. Sylvia stiffened.

"My poor uncle's death did not seem to trouble you greatly this morning," she said. "Kindly leave me now. I'll follow soon. I am waiting for Mr. Trenholme, who wants to show me some sketches."

"A nice time to look at sketches, upon my word! And who's Trenholme, I'd like to know?"

Sylvia bethought herself. Certainly an explanation was needful, and her feminine wit supplied one instantly.

"MR. TRENHOLME was sent here by the Scotland Yard people," she said, a trifle less frigidly. "I suppose we shall all be mixed up in the inquiry the detectives are holding, and it seems that Mr. Trenholme was at work in the park this morning when that awful affair took place. Unknown to me, I was near the spot where he was sketching before breakfast, and one of the detectives, the little one, says it is important that—that the fact should be proved. Mr. Trenholme called to tell me just what happened. So you see there is nothing in his action that should annoy any one—you least of any, since you were away from home at the time."

"But why has he mizzled over the wall?"

"He is staying at the White Horse Inn, and has gone to fetch the drawings."

"Oh, I didn't understand. If that's it, I'll wait till he turns up. You'll soon get rid of him."

Sylvia had no valid reason to urge against

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this decision, but she did not desire Robert's company, and chose a feminine method of resenting it.

"I don't think Mr. Trenholme will be anxious to meet you," she said coolly.

"Why not?"

"You are such a transparent person in your likes and dislikes. You have never even seen him, in the ordinary sense of the word, yet you speak of him in a way so unwarranted, so ridiculously untrue, that your manner might annoy him."

"My manner, indeed! Is he so precious then? By gad, it'll be interesting to look this rare bird over."

She turned her back on him and leaned on the wall again. Her slight, lissome figure acquired a new elegance from her black dress. Robert had never set eyes on Sylvia in such a costume before that day. Hitherto she had been a school girl, a flapper, a straight-limbed, boyish young person in long frocks; but today she seemed to have put on a new air of womanliness, and he found it strangely attractive.

"There's no sense in our quarreling about the chap anyhow," he said with a gruff attempt to smooth away difficulties. "Of course, I sha'n't let on I followed you. Just spotted you in the distance and joined you by chance, don't you know."

Sylvia did not answer. She was comparing Robert Fenley's conversational style with John Trenholme's, and the comparison was unflattering to Robert.

So he, too, came and leaned on the wall.

"I'm sorry if I annoyed you just now, Syl," he said. "That dashed little detective is to blame. He does put things in such a beastly unpleasant way."

"What things?"

"Why, about you and me and all of us. Gave me a regular lecture because I went back to town this morning. I couldn't help it, old girl. I really couldn't. I had to settle some urgent business, but that's all ended now. The pater's death has steadied me. No more gallivanting off to London for me. Settle down in Roxton, Board of Guardians on Saturdays, church on Sunday, tea and tennis at the vicarage, and 'you-come-to-our-place-tomorrow.' You know the sort of thing—old-fashioned, respectable and comfy. I'll sell my motor bike and start a car. Motor bikes make a fellow a bit of a vagabond—eh, what? They *will* go the pace. You can't stop 'em. Fifty per, and be hanged to the police, that's their motto."

"It sounds idyllic," the girl forced herself to say lightly, but her teeth met with a snap, and her fingers gripped the rough surface of the stones, for she remembered how Trenholme had said of her that she "reveled in the sunlight, in the golden air, in the scents of trees and shrubs and flowering grasses."

There was a musical cadence in her voice that restored Robert's surly good humor; he was of that peculiar type of spoiled youth whose laugh is a guffaw and whose mirth ever holds a snarl.

"Here comes your paint slinger," he said. "Wonder if he really can stage a decent picture. If so, when the present fuss is ended we'll get him to do a group. You and me and the keepers and dogs in front of the Warren Covert, next October, after a big drive. How would that be?"

"I'm sure Mr. Trenholme will feel flattered."

When Trenholme approached he was not too well pleased to find Miss Manning in charge of a new cavalier.

From items gathered earlier in the village he guessed the newcomer's identity. Perhaps he expected that the girl would offer an introduction, but she only smiled pleasantly and said:

"You must have hurried. I do hope I haven't put you to any inconvenience?"

"Eliza informed me that she had just popped my chicken in the oven, so there is plenty of time," he said. "I suppose it makes one hot to be constantly popping things into ovens. In the course of years one should become a sort of salamander. Have you ever read the autobiography of that great artist and very complete rascal, Benvenuto Cellini? He is the last person reputed to have seen a real salamander in the fire, and he only remembered the fact because his father beat him lest he should forget it."

"Ben who?" broke in Robert cheerfully.

"Benvenuto Cellini."

"Never heard of him. . . . Well, let's have a peep-o. Miss Manning and I dine at a quarter to eight. You've been taking some snapshots in the park, I'm told. If they've got any ginger in them——"

"Probably you will describe them as hot stuff," said Trenholme, laying a portfolio on the wall in front of Sylvia and opening it.

"This is a pencil drawing of the great gates," he went on, ignoring Fenley. "Of

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course, they're Wren's, and therefore beautiful. Roxton Park holds a real treasure in those gates, Miss Manning. Here is a water color sketch of the house and grounds. Do you like it?"

"Oh, it is exquisite! Why, you have caught the very glint of sunshine on the walls and roofs, and it is shimmering in the leaves of that copper beech. Ah me! It looks so easy."

Robert peered over her shoulder. Sylvia's gasp of admiration annoyed him; but he looked and said nothing.

"This," continued Trenholme, "is an unfinished study of the lake. I was so busily occupied that I was not aware of your presence until you were quite near at hand. Then when you dived into the water I grabbed a canvas and some tubes of paint. Here is the result—completed, to a large extent, in my room at the inn."

He took a picture out of a compartment of the portfolio specially constructed to protect an undried surface, and placed it at an angle that suited the light. His tone was unconcerned, for he had steeled himself against this crucial moment. Would she be angered? Would those limpid blue eyes, violet now in shadow, be raised to his in protest and vexed dismay? During the brief walk to and from the inn he had recollected the girl's age, her surroundings, the cramping influences of existence in a society of middle-class City folk. He felt like a prisoner awaiting a verdict when the issue was doubtful, and a wave of impulse might sway the jury one way or the other.

But he held his head high, and his face flushed slightly, for there could be no gainsaying the message glowing from that cunning brush work. There were two goddesses, one in marble and one palpitating with life. The likeness, too, was undeniable. If one was a replica of Greek art at its zenith, the other was unmistakably Sylvia Manning.

The girl gazed long and earnestly. Her pale cheeks had reddened for an instant, but the flood of surprise and emotion ebbed as quickly as it flowed, and left her wan, with parted lips.

At last she looked at Trenholme and spoke.

"THANK you!" she said, and their eyes met.

The artist understood; and he in turn, blanched somewhat. Rather hastily he replaced the picture in its receptacle.

Robert Fenley coughed and grinned, and the spell was broken.

"You said I'd call it hot stuff," he said. "Well, you sized my opinion up to a T. Of course, it's jolly clever—any fellow can see that——"

"Good night, Mr. Trenholme," said Sylvia, and she made off at a rapid pace. Robert grinned again.

"No young lady would stand that sort of thing," he chuckled. "You didn't really think she would—eh, what? But look here, I'll buy it. Send me a line later."

He hurried after Sylvia, running to overtake her. Trenholme stood there a long time; in fact, until the two were hidden by the distant line of trees. Then he smiled.

"So you are Robert Fenley," he communed, packing the portfolio leisurely. "Well, if Sylvia Manning marries you, I'll be a bachelor all my days, for I'll never dare imagine I know anything about a woman's soul; though I'm prepared at this hour of grace to stake my career that that girl's soul is worthy of her very perfect body."

Puffing a good deal, Fenley contrived to overhaul his "cousin."

"By jing, Sylvia, you can step out a bit," he said. "And you change your mind mighty quick. Five minutes ago you were ready to wait any length of time till that Johnny turned up, and now you're doing more than five per. What's the rush? It's only half past seven, and we don't dress tonight."

"I'm not dining downstairs," she answered.

"Oh, I say, I can't stand Hilton all alone."

"Nor can I stand either of you," she was tempted to retort, but contented herself by saying that she had arranged for a meal to be served in her aunt's room. Grumble and growl as he might, Robert could not shake her resolve; he was in a vile temper when he reached the dining-room.

His brother had not arrived, so he braced himself for an ordeal by drinking a stiff whisky and soda. When Hilton came in the pair nodded to each other but ate in silence. At last Robert glanced up at Tomlinson.

"Just shove the stuff on the table and clear out," he said. "We'll help ourselves. Mr. Hilton and I want to have a quiet talk."

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Hilton gave him a quick underlook but did not interfere. Perhaps purposely, when the servants had left the room he opened the battle with a sneer.

"I hope you didn't make a fool of yourself this evening," he said.

"As how?" queried Robert, wondrously subdued to all appearance, though aching to give the other what he called "a piece of his mind."

"I understand you made after Sylvia and the artist, meaning to chastise somebody."

"You were wrong," said Robert slowly. "You nearly always are. I make mistakes myself, but I own up handsomely. You don't. That's where we differ, see?"

"I see differences," and Hilton helped himself to a glass of claret.

"Trenholme, the artist Johnny, is a clever chap—slightly cracked, as they all are, but dashed clever. By gad, you ought to see the picture he's painted of Sylvia. Anyhow, you *will* see it. I've bought it."

"Really?"

"I said I'd buy it—same thing. He'll jump at the offer. It'll hang in my dressing-room. I don't suppose Sylvia will kick about a trifle like that when we're married."

Hilton was holding the glass of wine to his lips. His hand shook, and he spilled a little, but he drank the remainder.

"When did you decide to marry Sylvia?" he inquired, after a pause which might have been needed to gain control of his voice.

"It's been decided for a long time," said Robert doggedly, himself showing some signs of enforced restraint. "It was the pater's wish, as you know. I'm sorry now I didn't fix matters before he died; but 'better late than never.' I asked Sylvia today, and we've arranged to get married quite soon."

"Are you by any chance telling the truth?"

"What the blazes do you mean?" and Robert's fist pounded the table heavily.

"Exactly what I say. You say that you and Sylvia have arranged to get married quite soon. Those were your words. Is that true?"

"Confound you, of course it is."

"Sylvia has actually agreed to that?"

"I asked her. What more do you want?"

"I am merely inquiring civilly what she said."

"Dash it, you know what girls are like. You ought to. Isn't Eileen Garth a bit coy at times?"

"One might remark that Mrs. Lisle also was coy."

"Look here——" began Robert furiously, but the other checked him.

"LET us stop bickering like a couple of counter jumpers," he said, and a shrewder man than Robert might have been warned by the slow, incisive utterance. "You make an astonishing announcement on an occasion when it might least be expected, yet resent any doubt being thrown on its accuracy. Did or did not Sylvia accept you?"

"Well, she said something about not wishing to talk of marriage so soon after the old man's death, but that was just her way of putting it. I mean to marry her; and when a fellow has made up his mind on a thing like that it's best to say so and have done with it. Sylvia's a jolly nice girl, and has plenty of tin. I'm first in the field, so I'm warning off any other candidates. See?"

"Yes, I see," said Hilton, pouring out another glass of wine. This time his hand was quite steady, and he drank without mishap.

"Ain't you going to wish me luck?" said Robert, eying him viciously.

"I agree with Sylvia. The day we have lost our father is hardly a fitting time for such a discussion; or shall I say ceremony?"

"You can say what the devil you like. And you can do what you like. Only keep off my corns and I won't tread on yours."

Having, as he fancied, struck a decisive blow in the struggle for that rare prize, Sylvia, Robert Fenley pushed back his chair, arose, waited a second for an answer which came not and strode out, muttering something about being "fed up."

Hilton's face was lowered, and one nervous hand shaded his brows. Robert thought he had scored, but he could not see the inhuman rage blazing in those hidden eyes. The discovery, had he made it, might not have distressed him, but he would surely have been puzzled by the strange smile which wrinkled Hilton's sallow cheeks when the door closed and the Eurasian was left alone in the dining-room.

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CHAPTER XII

WHEREIN SCOTLAND YARD IS DINED AND WINED

THREE dinners for two were in progress in The Towers at one and the same hour. One feast had been shortened by the ill concealed hatred of each brother for the other. At the second, brooding care found unwonted lodging in the charming personality of Sylvia Manning—care, almost foreboding, heightened by the demented mutterings of her "aunt." At the third, with the detectives, sat responsibility; but lightheartedly withal, since these seasoned man hunters could cast off their day's work like a garment.

The first and second meals were of the high quality associated with English country houses of a superior class; the third was a spread for epicures. Tomlinson saw to that. He was catering for a gourmet in Furneaux, and rose to the requisite height.

The little man sighed as he tasted the soup.

"What is it now?" inquired Winter, whose glance was dwelling appreciatively on a dusty bottle labeled "Clos Vosgeot, 1879."

"I hate eating the food of a man whom I mean to produce as a star turn at the Old Bailey," was the despondent answer.

"So do I, if it comes to that," said Winter briskly. "But this appetizing menu comes out of another larder. I shall be vastly mistaken if we're not actually the guests of a certain pretty young lady. Finance of the Fenley order is not in good odor in the City.

"Have no scruples, my boy. We may be vultures at the feast; but before we see the end of the Fenley case there'll be a smash in Bishopsgate Street, and Miss Sylvia Manning will be lucky if some sharp lawyer is able to grab some part of the wreckage for her benefit."

"Clear logic, at any rate." And Furneaux brightened visibly.

"I'll tell you what it's based on. Our swarthy friend was examining lists of securities in the train. He didn't lift his head quickly enough—took me for a ticket puncher, I expect—so I had time to twig what he was doing. I'd like to run my eye over the papers in that leather portfolio."

"You may manage it. You're the luckiest fellow breathing. Such opportunities come your way. *I* have to make them."

After an interlude played by sole Colbert, Winter shot an amused question at his companion.

"What's at the back of your head with regard to the artist and Miss Sylvia?" he said.

"It's high time she spoke to a real man. These Fenleys are animals, all of 'em. John Trenholme is a genius, and a good-looking one."

"I met the girl in a corridor a while ago, and she was rather disconsolate, I thought."

"And with good reason. You've noticed how each brother eyes her. They'll fight like jackals before this night is out. I hope Sylvia will indulge in what women call a good cry. That will be Trenholme's golden hour. Some Frenchman—of course he was clever, being French—says that a man should beware when a woman smiles but he may dare all when she weeps."

"Are we marriage brokers, then?"

"We must set the Fenleys at each other's throats."

"Yes," mused Winter aloud, when a *ris de veau bonne maman* had passed like a dream, "this affair is becoming decidedly interesting. But every why hath a wherefore, according to Shakespeare. Tell me—" and his voice sank to a whisper— "tell me why you believe Hilton Fenley killed his father."

"You nosed your way into that problem this afternoon. Between his mother and that girl, Eileen Garth, he was in a tight place. He stole those bonds. I fancied it at the time, but I know it now. They were negotiated in Paris by a woman who occupied a room in the Hotel d'Italie, Rue Caumartin, Paris, and one of her registered boxes bore the rail number, 517."

"YOU little devil!" blazed out Winter. "And you never said a word when I told you!"

"Astonishment has rendered you incoherent. You mean, of course, when you told me you had seen in Gloucester Mansions a box labeled in accordance with the facts I have just retailed. But I yield that minor point. It is a purist's, at the best. I have supplied a motive, one motive, for the crime; the plotter feared discovery. But there are dozens of others. He was impatient of the old man's rigid control. Hilton is sharp and shrewd, and he guessed things

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were going wrong financially. He knew that his father's methods were out of date, and believed he could straighten the tangle if the reins of power were not withheld too long.

"He saw that Sylvia Manning's gold was in the melting-pot, and appreciated precisely the cause of the elder Fenley's anxiety that she should marry Robert. Once in the family, you know, her fortunes were bound up with theirs; while any 'cute lawyer could dish her in the marriage settlements if sufficiently well paid for a nasty job. When Sylvia was Mrs. Robert Fenley, and perhaps mother of a squalling Fenley, the head of the business could face the future, if not with confidence, at least with safety. But where would Hilton be then? The girl lost, the money in jeopardy, and he himself steadily elbowed out. *'Cré nom!* I've known men murdered for less convincing reasons."

"Men, yes; not fathers."

"Some sons are the offspring of Beelzebub. Consider the parentage in this instance. Fenley, a groom and horse coper on the one hand, and the dark daughter of a Calcutta merchant on the other. If the progeny of such a union escaped a hereditary taint it would be a miracle. Cremate Hilton Fenley and his very dust will contain evil germs."

"You're strong in theory but weak in proof."

That style of argument invariably nettled Furneaux.

"You must butt into a few more mysterious suites of apartments in London and elsewhere, and you'll supply proof in bucketfuls," he snapped.

"But was there an accomplice? Squirm as you like, you can't get over the fact that Hilton was in his room when the bullet that killed his father came from the wood."

"He is not the sort of person likely to trust his liberty, his life even, to the keeping of any other human being. I start from the hypothesis that he alone planned and carried out the crime, so I do not lift my hands and cry 'Impossible,' but I ask myself, 'How was it done?' Well, there are several methods worthy of consideration—clockwork, electricity, even a time fuse attached to the proper mechanism. I haven't really bothered myself yet to determine the means, because when that knowledge becomes indispensable we must have our man under lock and key."

"Of course, the rifle is securely fixed in that——"

The door opened. Tomlinson came in, smiling blandly.

"I hope you are enjoying your dinner, gentlemen both?" he said.

"You have made your cook an artist," said Furneaux.

"I suppose you are happier here than in a big London restaurant," said Winter.

The butler appreciated such subtle compliments, and beamed on them.

"With a little encouragement and advice, our chef can prepare a very eatable dinner," he said. "As for my own ambitions, I have had them, like every man worth his salt; but I fill a comfortable chair here—no worry, no grumbling, not a soul to say *nem* or *con*, so long as things go smoothly."

"It must have been *nem* all the time," giggled Furneaux, and Winter was so afflicted by a desire to sneeze that he buried his face in a napkin.

"And how was the wine?" went on Tomlinson, with an eye on the little man. Furneaux's features were crinkled in a Japanese smile. He wanted to kick Winter, who was quivering with suppressed laughter.

"I never expected to find such vintages in a house of the *mauvais riches*," he said. "Perhaps you don't speak French, Mr. Tomlinson, so allow me to explain that I am alluding to men of wealth not born in the purple."

"Precisely—self-made. Well, sir, poor Mr. Fenley left the stocking of his cellar entirely to me. I gave the matter much thought. When my knowledge was at fault I consulted experts, and the result——"

"That is the result," cried Furneaux, seizing the empty claret bottle, and planting it so firmly on the table that the cutlery danced.

A shoulder of lamb, served *à la Soubise*, appeared; and Tomlinson, announcing that his presence in the dining-room had been dispensed with, thought he would join them in a snack. Being a hospitable creature, he opened another bottle of the Clos Vosgeot, but his guests were not to be tempted.

"Well, then," he said, "in a few minutes you must try our port. It is not Alto Douro, Mr. Furneaux, but it has body and bowket."

Winter was better prepared this time.

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Moreover, he was carving, and aware of a master's criticism, and there are occult problems connected with even such a simple joint as a shoulder of lamb. Furneaux, too, was momentarily subdued. He seemed to be reflecting sadly that statues of gold, silver and bronze may have feet of clay.

"I have often thought, gentlemen," said the butler, "that yours must be a most interesting profession. You meet all sorts and conditions of men and women."

"We consort with the noblest malefactors," agreed Furneaux.

"Dear me, sir, you do use the queerest words. Now, I should never dream of describing a criminal as noble."

"Not in the generally accepted sense, perhaps. But you, I take it, have not had the opportunity of attending a really remarkable trial, when, say, some intellectual giant among murderers is fighting for his life. Believe me, no drama of the stage can rival that tragedy.

"The chief actor, remote, solitary, fenced away from the world he is hoping to reenter, sits there in state. Every eye is on him, yet he faces judge, jury, counsel, witnesses and audience with a calm dignity worthy of an emperor. He listens imperturbably to facts which may hang him, to lies which may lend color to the facts, to well meaning guesses which are wide of the mark. Truthful and false evidence is equally prone to err when guilt or innocence must be determined by circumstances alone.

"But the prisoner *knows*. He is the one man able to discriminate between truth and falsity, yet he must not reveal the cruel stab of fact or the harmless buffet of fiction by so much as a flicker of an eyelid. He surveys the honest blunderer and the perjured ruffian—I mean the counsel for the defense and the prosecution respectively—with impartial scrutiny. If he is a sublime villain, he will call on Heaven to testify that he is innocent with a solemnity not surpassed by the judge who sentences him to death. . . . Yes, please, a bit off the knuckle end."

THE concluding words were addressed to Winter, and Tomlinson started, for he was wrapped up in the scene Furneaux was depicting.

"That point of view had not occurred to me," he admitted.

"You'll appreciate it fully when you see Mr. Fenley's murderer in the dock," said Furneaux.

"Ah, sir. That brings your illustration home, indeed. But shall we ever know who killed him?"

"Certainly. Look at that high dome of intelligence glistening at you across the table. But that it is forbid to tell the secrets of the prison house, it could a tale unfold whose slightest word would harrow up thy soul——"

Harris, the footman, entered, carrying a decanter.

"Mr. Hilton Fenley's compliments, gentlemen, and will you try this port? He says Mr. Tomlinson will recommend it, because Mr. Fenley himself seldom takes wine. Mr. Fenley will not trouble you to meet him again this evening. Mr. Tomlinson, Mr. Fenley wants you for a moment."

The butler rose.

"That is the very wine I spoke of," he said. "If Mr. Hilton did not touch it, Mr. Robert evidently appreciated it."

He glanced at Harris, but the footman did not even suspect that his character was at stake. The decanter was nearly full when placed on the sideboard; now it was half empty.

Singularly enough, both Winter and Furneaux had intercepted that questioning glance, and had acquitted Harris simultaneously.

"Are the gentlemen still in the dining-room?" inquired Winter.

"Mr. Hilton is there, sir, but Mr. Robert went out some time since."

"Please convey our thanks to Mr. Hilton. I'm sure we shall enjoy the wine."

When Tomlinson and Harris had gone, the eyes of the two detectives met. They said nothing at first, and it may be remembered that they were reputedly most dangerous to a pursued criminal when working together silently. Winter took the decanter, poured out a small quantity into two glasses, and gave Furneaux one. Then they smelled, and tasted, and examined the wine critically. The rich red liquid might have been a poisonous decoction for the care they devoted to its analysis.

Furneaux began.

"I have so many sleepless nights that I recognize bromide, no matter how it is disguised," he murmured.

"Comparatively harmless, though a strong dose," said Winter.

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"If one has to swallow twenty grains or so of potassium bromide I can not conceive any pleasanter way of taking them than mixed with a sound port."

Winter filled one of the glasses four times, pouring each amount into a tumbler. Furneaux looked into a cupboard, and found an empty beer bottle, which he rinsed with water. Meanwhile Winter was fashioning a funnel out of a torn envelope, and in a few seconds the tumblerful of wine was in the bottle, and the bottle in Winter's pocket. This done, the big man lit a cigar and the little one sniffed the smoke, which was his peculiar way of enjoying the weed.

"It was most thoughtful of Mr. Hilton Fenley to try and secure us a long night's uninterrupted sleep," said Winter between puffs.

"But what a vitiated taste in wine he must attribute to Scotland Yard," said Furneaux bitterly.

"Still, we should be grateful to him for supplying a gill of real evidence."

"I may forgive him later. At present, I want to dilate his eyes with atropine, so that he may see weird shapes and be tortured of ghouls."

"Poor devil! He won't need atropine for that."

"Don't believe it, James. In some respects he's cold-blooded as a fish. Besides, he carries bromide tablets for his own use. He simply couldn't have arranged beforehand to dope us."

"He's getting scared."

"I should think so, indeed—in the Fenley sense, that is. His plot against Robert has miscarried in one essential. The rifle has not been found in the wood. Now, I'm in chastened mood, because the hour for action approaches; so I'll own up. I've been keeping something up my sleeve, just for the joy of watching you floundering 'midst deep waters. Of course, you chose the right channel. I knew you would, but it's a treat to see your elephantine struggles. For all that, it's a sheer impossibility that you should guess who put a sprag in the wheel of Hilton's chariot. Give you three tries, for a new hat."

"You're desperately keen today on touching me for a new hat."

"Well, this time you have an outside chance. The others were certs—for me."

Winter smoked in silence for a space.

"I'll take you," he said. "The artist?"

"No." The Jerseyman shook his head.

"Police Constable Farrow?" ventured Winter again."

FURNEAUX'S dismay was so comical that his colleague shook with mirth.

"I wanted a new silk topper," wheezed Winter.

"Silk topper be hanged. I meant a straw, and that's what you'll get. But how the deuce did you manage to hit upon Farrow?"

"He closed the Quarry Wood at the psychological moment."

"You're sucking my brains, that's what you're doing," grumbled Furneaux. "Anyhow, you're right. Hilton had the scheme perfected to the last detail, but he didn't count on Farrow. After a proper display of agitation—not all assumed, either, because he was more shaken than he expected to be—he 'phoned the Yard and the doctor. We couldn't arrive for nearly an hour, and the doctor starts on his rounds at nine o'clock sharp. What so easy, therefore, as to wander out in a welter of grief and anger, and search the wood for the murderer on his own account? One solitary minute would enable him to put the rifle in a hiding-place where it would surely be discovered.

"But Farrow stopped him. I wormed the whole thing out of our sentry this afternoon. Fenley tried hard to send Farrow and Bates off on a wild-goose chase, but Farrow, quite mistakenly, saw the chance of his life and clung on to it. Had Farrow budged we could never have hanged Hilton. Don't you see how the scheme works? He had some reason for believing that Robert will refuse to give a full account of his whereabouts this morning. Therefore, he must contrive that the rifle shall be found. Put the two damning facts together, and Robert is tied in a knot. Of course, he would be forced to prove an alibi, but by that time all England would be yelping, 'Thou art the man.' In any event, Hilton's trail would be hopelessly lost."

"The true bowket of our port and bromide begins to tickle my nostrils."

A good-looking maid brought coffee, and Furneaux grinned at her.

"How do you think he'd look in a nice straw hat?" he asked, jerking his head toward Winter. The girl smiled. The little

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man's reputation had reached the kitchen. She glanced demurely at the Superintendent's bullet head.

"Not an ordinary straw. You mean a Panama," she said.

"Certainly," laughed Winter.

"Nothing of the sort," howled Furneaux. "Just run your eye over him. He isn't an isthmus—he's a continent."

"A common straw wouldn't suit him," persisted the girl. "He's too big a gentleman."

"How little you know him!" said Furneaux.

The girl blushed and giggled.

"Go on!" she said, and bounced out.

"This inquiry will cost you a bit, my boy, if you're not careful," sniggered Winter. "I'll compound on a straw; but take my advice, and curb your sporting propensities. Now, if this coffee isn't doctored, let's drink it, and interview Robert before the bromide begins to act."

Robert Fenley received them in his own room. He strove to appear at ease and business-like, but, as Furneaux had surmised, was emphatic in his refusal to give any clear statement as to his proceedings in London. He admitted the visit to Hendon Road, which, he said, was necessitated by a promise to a friend who was going abroad, but he failed to see why the police should inquire into his private affairs.

Winter did not press him. There was no need. A scapegrace's record could always be laid bare when occasion served. But one question he was bound to put.

"Have you any theory, however remote or far-fetched, that will account for your father's death in such a way?" he inquired.

The younger Fenley was smoking a cigarette. A half consumed whisky and soda stood on a table; a bottle of whisky and a siphon promised refreshers. He was not quite sober, but could speak lucidly.

"Naturally, I've been thinking a lot about that," he said, wrinkling his forehead in the effort to concentrate his mind and express himself with due solemnity. "It's funny, isn't it, that my rifle should be missing?"

"Well, yes."

Some sarcastic inflection in Winter's voice seemed to reach a rather torpid brain. Fenley looked up sharply.

"Of course, funny isn't the right word," he said. "I mean it's odd, a bit of a mystery. Why should anybody take my gun if they wanted to shoot my poor old guv'nor? That beats me. It's a licker—eh, what?"

"It is more important to know why any one should want to shoot your father."

"That's it. Who benefits? Well, I suppose Hilton and I will be better off—no one else. And I didn't do it. It's silly even to say so."

"But there is only your brother left in your summary."

"By Jove, yes. That's been runnin' in my head. It's nonsense, anyhow, because Hilton was in the house. I wouldn't believe a word he said, but Sylvia, and Tomlinson, and Brodie, and Harris all tell the same yarn. No; Hilton couldn't have done it. He's ripe for any mischief, is Hilton, but he can't be in this hole; now, can he?"

They could extract nothing of value out of Robert, and left him after a brief visit.

In the interim, Hilton Fenley had kept Tomlinson talking about the crime. The dining-room door was ajar, and he knew when the detectives had gone to Robert's room. Then he glanced around the table, and affected to remember the decanter of port.

"By the way," he said, "I feel as if a glass of that wine would be a good notion tonight. I don't suppose the Scotland Yard men have finished the lot. Just send for it, will you?"

Harris brought the decanter, and Tomlinson was gratified by seeing that his favorite beverage had been duly appraised.

"Sorry if I've detained you," said Fenley, and the butler went out. Rising, Fenley strolled to the door and closed it. Instantly he became energetic, and his actions bore a curious similitude to those of Winter a little while earlier. Pouring the wine into a tumbler, he rinsed the decanter with water, and partly refilled it with the contents of another tumbler previously secreted in the sideboard, stopping rather short of the amount of wine returned from the butler's room. He drank the remainder, washed the glass, and put a few drops of whisky into it.

Carrying the other tumbler to an open window, he threw the medicated wine into a drain under a water spout, and making assurance doubly sure, douched the same locality with water; also, he rinsed this second glass. He seemed to be rather pleased at his own thoroughness.

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As Furneaux had said, Hilton Fenley was cold-blooded as a fish.

CHAPTER XIII

CLOSE QUARTERS

HUMAN affairs are peculiarly dependent on the weather. It is not easy to lay down a law governing this postulate, which, indeed, may be scoffed at by the superficial reasoner, and the progression from cause to effect is often obscured by contradictory facts. For instance, a fine Summer means a good harvest, much traveling, the prolongation of holiday periods, a free circulation of money, and the consequent enhanced prosperity and happiness of millions of men and women. But there are more suicides in June and July than in December and January. In the one case, fine weather improves humanity's lot; in the other, it depresses the individual.

Let the logician explain these curiously divergent issues as he may; there can be no question that the quality of the night which closed a day eventful beyond any other in the annals of Roxton exercised a remarkable influence on the lives of five people. It was a perfect night in June. There was no moon; the stars shone dimly through a silent haze; but the sun had set late and would rise early, and his complete disappearance followed so small a chord of the diurnal circle that his light was never wholly absent. A gentle westerly breeze was so zephyr-like that it hardly stirred the leaves of the trees, but it wafted the scent of flowers and meadow land into open windows, and was grateful alike to the just and the unjust.

Thus to romantic minds it was redolent of romance; and as Sylvia Manning's room faced south and John Trenholme's faced north, and lay nearly opposite each other, though separated by a rolling mile of park, woodland, tillage and pasture, it is not altogether incredible that those two, gazing out at the same hour, should bridge the void with the eyes of the soul.

It was a night, too, that invited to the open.

In some favored lands, where the almanac is an infallible Clerk of the Weather, fine nights succeed each other with the monotonous regularity of kings in an Amurath dynasty. But the British climate, a slave to no such ordered sequence, scatters or withholds these magic hours almost impartially throughout the seasons, so that June may demand overcoats and umbrellas, and October invite Summer raiment.

Hence this superb Summer's night found certain folk in Roxton disinclined to forego its enchantments. Trenholme, trying to persuade himself that his brooding gaze rested on the Elizabethan roofs and gables rising above the trees because of some rarely spiritual quality in the atmosphere, suddenly awoke to the fact that the hour was eleven.

Some men issued from the bar parlor and "snug" beneath, and there were sounds of bolts being shot home and keys turned in recognition of the curfew imposed by the licensing laws. Then the artistic temperament arose in revolt. Chafing already against the narrow confines of the best room the White Horse Inn could provide, it burst all bounds when a tired potman attempted unconsciously to lock it in.

Grabbing a pipe and tobacco pouch, Trenholme ran downstairs, meeting the potman in the passage.

"Get me a key, Bill," he said. "I simply can't endure the notion of bed just yet, so I'm off for a stroll. I don't want to keep any one waiting up, and I suppose I can have a key of sorts."

Now it happened that the proprietor of the inn was absent at a race meeting, and Eliza was in charge. Trenholme's request was passed on to her, and a key was forthcoming.

Hatless, pipe in mouth, and hands in pockets, Trenholme sauntered into the village street. Romance was either a dull jade or growing old and sedate in Roxton. Nearly every house was in darkness, and more than one dog barked because of a passing footstep.

About half past eleven, Sylvia Manning, sitting in melancholy near her window after an hour of musing, heard a light tap on the door.

"Come in," she said, recognizing the reason of this late intrusion. An elderly woman entered. She was an attendant charged with special care of Mrs. Fenley. A trained nurse would have refused to adopt the lenient treatment of the patient enjoined by the late head of the family, so this woman was engaged because she was honest, faithful, rather stupid and obeyed orders.

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"She has quieted down now, miss, and is fast asleep," she said in a low tone. "You may feel sure she won't wake before six or seven. She never does."

The "she" of this message was Mrs. Fenley. Rural England does not encourage unnecessary courtesy nor harbor such foreign intruders as "madam." The reiterated pronoun grated on Sylvia; she was disinclined for further talk.

"Thank you, Parker," she said. "I am glad to know that. Good night."

BUT Parker had something to say, and this was a favorable opportunity.

"She's been awful bad today, miss. It can't go on."

"That is hardly surprising, taking into account the shock Mrs. Fenley received this morning."

"That's what I have in me mind, miss. She's changed."

"How changed? You need not close the door. Never mind the light. It is hardly dark when the eyes become used to the gloom."

Parker drew nearer. Obeying the instincts of her class, she assumed a confidential tone.

"Well, miss, you know why you went out?"

"Yes," said Sylvia rather curtly. She had left the invalid when the use of a hypodermic syringe became essential if an imminent outburst of hysteria was to be prevented. The girl had no power to interfere, and was too young and inexperienced to make an effective protest; but she was convinced that to encourage a vice was not the best method of treating it. More than once she had spoken of the matter to Mortimer Fenley; but he merely said that he had tried every known means to cure his wife, short of immuring her in an asylum, and had failed. "She is happy in a sort of a way," he would add, with a certain softening of voice and manner. "Let her continue so." Thus a minor tragedy was drifting to its close when Fenley himself was so rudely robbed of life.

"As a rule, miss," went on the attendant, "she soon settles after a dose, but this time she seemed to pass into a sort of a trance. Gen'rally her words are broken-like an' wild, an' I pays no heed to 'em; but tonight she talked wonderful clear, all about India at first, an' of a band playin', with sogers marchin' past. Then she spoke about some people called coolies. There was a lot about them, in lines an' tea gardens. An' she seemed to be speakin' to another Mrs. Fenley."

The woman's voice sank to an awe-stricken whisper, and Sylvia shivered somewhat in sympathy. "Another Mrs. Fenley!" It was common knowledge in the household that Fenley had married a second time, but the belief was settled that the first wife was dead; Parker, by an unrehearsed dramatic touch, conveyed the notion that the unhappy creature in a neighboring room had been conversing with a ghost.

Somewhat shaken and perturbed, Sylvia wished more than ever to be alone, so she brought her informant back to the matter in hand.

"I don't see that Mrs. Fenley's rambling utterances give rise to any fear of immediate collapse," she said, striving to speak composedly.

"No, miss. That isn't it at all. I was just tellin' you what happened. There was a lot more. She might ha' been givin' the story of her life. But—please forgive me, miss, for what I'm goin' to say. I think some one ought to know—I do, reelly—an' you're the only one I dare tell it to."

"Oh, what is it?"

The cry was wrung from the girl's heart. She had borne a good deal that day, and feared some sinister revelation now.

"She remembered that poor Mr. Fenley was dead, but didn't appear so greatly upset. She was more puzzled-like—kep' on mutterin': 'Who did it? Who could have the cool darin' to shoot him dead in broad daylight, at his own door, before his servants?' She was sort of forcin' herself to think, to find out, just as if it was a riddle, an' the right answer was on the tip of her tongue. An' then, all at once, she gev a queer little laugh. 'Why, of course, it was Hilton,' she said."

Sylvia, relieved and vastly indignant, rose impetuously.

"Why do you trouble to bring such nonsense to my ears?" she cried.

But Parker was stolid and dogged.

"I had to tell some one," she vowed, determined to put herself straight with one of her own sex. "I know her ways. If that's in her mind she'll be shoutin' it out to every maid who comes near her tomorrow; an' I reelly thought, miss, it was wise to tell you

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tonight, because such a thing would soon cause a scandal, an' it should be stopped."

"Perhaps you are right, and I ought to be obliged to you for being so considerate. But no one would pay heed to my aunt's ravings. Every person in the house knows that the statement is absurd. Mr. Hilton was in his room. I myself saw him go upstairs after exchanging a few words with his father in the hall, and he came down again instantly when Harris ran to fetch him."

"I understand that, miss, an' I'm not so silly as to think there is any sense in her blamin' Mr. Hilton. But it made my flesh creep to hear all the rest so clear an' straightforward, an' then that she should say: 'Hilton did it, the black beast. He always hated Bob an' me, because we were white, an' the jungle strain has come out at last.' Oh, it was somethink dreadful to hear her laughin' at her cleverness. I——"

"Please, please, don't repeat any more of these horrible things," cried the girl, for the strain was becoming unbearable.

"I agree with you, miss. They aren't fit to be spoke of; an' I say, with all due respec', that they shouldn't be allowed to leak out. You know what young maid servants are like. They're bound to chatter. My idee is that another nurse should be engaged tomorrow, a woman old enough to hold her tongue an' mind her own business; then the two of us can take turns at duty, so as to keep them housemaids out of the way altogether."

"Yes, I'm sure you are right. I'll speak to Mr. Hilton in the morning. Thank you, Parker. I see now that you meant well, and I'm sorry if I spoke sharply."

"I'm not surprised, miss. It was not a pleasant thing to have to say, nor for you to hear, but duty is duty. Good night, miss. I hope you'll sleep well."

SLEEP! Parker should not have conjured up a new apparition if Sylvia was to seek the solace of untroubled rest. At present the girl felt that she had never before been so distressfully awake. Splendidly vital in mind and body as she was, she almost yielded now to a morbid horror of her environment. Generations of men and women had lived and died in that ancient house, and tonight dim shapes seemed to throng its chambers and corridors. Physically fearless, she owned to a feminine dread of the unknown. It would be a relief to get away from this abode of grief and mystery. The fantastic dreaming of the unhappy creature crooning memories of a past life and a lost husband had unnerved her. She resolved to seek the fresh air, and wander through gardens and park until the fever in her mind had abated.

Now a rule of the house ordained that all doors should be locked and lower windows latched at midnight. A night watchman made certain rounds each hour, pressing a key into indicating-clocks at various points to show that he had been alert. Mortimer Fenley had been afraid of fire; there was so much old woodwork in the building that it would burn readily, and a short circuit in the electrical installation was always possible, though every device had been adopted to render it not only improbable but harmless. After midnight the door bells and others communicated with a switchboard in the watchman's room; and a burglary alarm, which the man adjusted during his first round, rang there continuously if disturbed.

Sylvia, leaving the door of her bedroom ajar, went to the servants' quarters by a back staircase. There she found MacBain, the watchman, eating his supper.

"I don't feel as though I could sleep," she explained, "so I am going out into the park for a while. I'll unlatch one of the drawing-room windows and disconnect the alarm; and when I come in again I'll tell you."

"Very well, miss," said MacBain. "It's a fine night, and you'll take no harm."

"I'm not afraid of rabbits, if that is what you mean," she said lightly, for the very sound of the man's voice had dispelled vapors.

"Oh, there's more than rabbits in the park tonight, miss. Two policemen are stationed in the Quarry Wood."

"Why?" she said, with some surprise.

"They don't know themselves, miss. The Inspector ordered it. I met them coming on duty at ten o'clock. They'll be relieved at four. They have instructions to allow no one to enter the wood. That's all they know."

"If I go there, then, shall I be locked up?"

"Not so bad as that, miss," smiled MacBain. "But I'd keep away from it if I was you. 'Let sleeping dogs lie' is a good motto."

"But these are not sleeping dogs. They're wide-awake policemen."

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"Mebbe, miss. They have a soft job, I'm thinking. Of course——"

The man checked himself, but Sylvia guessed what was passing in his mind.

"You were going to say that the wretch who killed my uncle hid in that wood?" she prompted him.

"Yes, miss, I was."

"He is not there now. He must have run away while we were too terrified to take any steps to capture him. Who in the world could have wished to kill Mr. Fenley?"

"Ah, miss, there's no knowing. Those you'd least suspect are often the worst."

MacBain shook his head over this cryptic remark; he glanced at a clock. It was five minutes to twelve.

"It's rather late, miss," he hinted. Sylvia agreed with him, but she was young enough to be headstrong.

"I sha'n't remain out very long," she said. "I ought to feel tired, but I don't; and I hope the fresh air will make me sleepy."

To reach the drawing-room, she had to cross the hall. Its parquet floor creaked under her rapid tread. A single lamp among a cluster in the ceiling burned there all night, and she could not help giving one quick look at the oaken settle which stood under the cross gallery; she was glad when the drawing-room door closed behind her.

She had no difficulty with the window, but the outer shutters creaked when she opened them. Then she passed on to the first of the Italian terraces, and stood there irresolutely a few minutes, gazing alternately at the sky and the black masses of the trees. At first she was a trifle nervous. The air was so still, the park so solemn in its utter quietude, that the sense of adventure was absent, and the funereal silence that prevailed was almost oppressive.

Half inclined to go back, woman-like she went forward. Then the sweet, clinging scent of a rose bed drew her like a magnet. She descended a flight of steps and gained the second terrace. She thought of Trenholme and the picture, and the impulse to stroll as far as the lake seized her irresistibly. Why not? The grass was short, and the dew would not be heavy. Even if she wetted her feet, what did it matter, as she would undress promptly on returning to her room? Besides, she had never seen the statue on just such a night, though she had often visited it by moonlight.

La Rochefoucauld is responsible for the oft quoted epigram that the woman who hesitates is lost, and Sylvia had certainly hesitated. At any rate, after a brief debate in which the arguments were distinctly one-sided, she resolved that she might as well have an object in view as stroll aimlessly in any other direction; so, gathering her skirts to keep them dry, she set off across the park.

She might have been half way to the lake when a man emerged from the same window of the drawing-room, ran to the terrace steps, stumbled down them so awkwardly that he nearly fell, and swore at his own clumsiness in so doing. He negotiated the next flight more carefully, but quickened his pace again into a run when he reached the open. The girl's figure was hardly visible, but he knew she was there, and the distance between pursued and pursuer soon lessened.

Sylvia, wholly unaware of being followed, did not hurry; but she was constitutionally incapable of loitering, and moved over the rustling grass with a swiftness that brought her to the edge of the lake while the second inmate of The Towers abroad that night was yet a couple of hundred yards distant.

IN THE dim light the statue assumed a lifelike semblance that was at once startling and wonderful. Color flies with the sun, and the white marble did not depend now on tint alone to differentiate it from flesh and blood. Seen thus indistinctly, it might almost be a graceful and nearly nude woman standing there, and some display of will power on the girl's part was called for before she approached nearer and stifled the first breath of apprehension. Then, delighted by the vague beauty of the scene, with senses soothed by the soft plash of the cascade, she decided to walk around the lake to the spot where Trenholme must have been hidden when he painted that astonishingly vivid picture. Its bold treatment and simplicity of note rendered it an easy subject to carry in the mind's eye, and Sylvia thought it would be rather nice to conjure up the same effect in the prevailing conditions of semi-darkness and mystery. She need not risk tearing her dress among the briers which clung to the hillside. Knowing every inch of the ground, she

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ould follow the shore of the lake until early opposite the statue, and then climb few feet among the bushes at a point where zigzag path, seldom used and nearly bliterated by undergrowth, led to the ump of cedars.

She was still speeding along the farther ank when a man's form loomed in sight in he park, and her heart throbbed tumultuusly with a new and real terror. Who ould it be? Had some one seen her leavng the house? That was the explanation he hoped for at first, but her breath came n sharp gusts and her breast heaved when she remembered how one deadly inruder at least had broken into that quiet aven during the early hours of the past day.

Whoever the oncomer might prove to be, he was losing no time, and he was yet some twenty yards or more away from the statue—itself separated from Sylvia by about the same width of water—when she recognized, with a sigh of relief, the somewhat cumbrous form and grampus-like puffing of Robert Fenley.

Evidently he was rather blear-eyed, since he seemed to mistake the white marble Aphrodite for a girl in a black dress; or perhaps he assumed that Sylvia was there, and thought he would see her at any moment.

"I say, Sylvia!" he cried. "I say, old girl, what the deuce are you doin'—in the park—at this time o' night?"

The words were clear enough, but there was a suspicious thickness in the voice. Robert had been drinking, and Sylvia had learned already to abhor and shun a man under the influence of intoxicants more than anything else in the wide world. She did not fear her "cousin." For years she had tolerated him, and that day she had come to dislike him actively, but she had not the least intention of entering into an explanation of her actions with him at that hour and under existing circumstances. She had recovered from her sudden fright, and was merely annoyed now, and bent her wits to the combined problems of escape and regaining the house unseen.

Remembering that her white face and hands might reveal her wherabouts she turned, bent and crept up the slope until a bush afforded welcome concealment. Some thorns scratched her ankles, but she gave no heed to such trivial mishaps. A rabbit jumped out from under her feet, and it cost something of an effort to repress a slight scream; but—to her credit be it said—she set her lips tightly, and was almost amused by the game of hide and seek thus unexpectedly thrust on her.

Meanwhile Robert had reached the little promontory on which the statue was poised, and no Sylvia was in sight.

"Sylvia!" he cried again. "Where are you? No use hidin', because I know you're here! Dash it all, if you wanted a bit of a stroll why didn't you send for me? You knew I'd come like a shot—eh, what?"

He listened and peered, but might as well have been deaf and blind for aught he could distinguish of the girl he sought.

Then he laughed; and a peculiar quality in that chuckle of mirth struck a new note of anxiety, even of fear, in Sylvia's laboring heart.

"So you won't be good!" he guffawed thickly. "Playin' Puss in the Corner, I suppose? Very well, I give you fair warnin'. I mean to catch you, an' when I do I'll claim forfeit. . . . *I* don't mind. Fact is, I like it. It's rather fun chasin' one's best girl in the dark. . . . Dashed if it isn't better'n a bit out of a French farce. . . . Puss! Puss! . . . I see you. . . . Hidin' there among the bushy bushes. . . . Gad! How's that for a test after a big night? Bushy bushes! I must not forget that. Try it on one of the b-hoys. . . . Now, come out of it! . . . Naughty puss! I'll get you in a tick, see if I don't!"

He was keeping to the track Sylvia herself had taken, since the lie of the land was familiar to him as to her. Talking to himself, cackling at his own flashes of wit, halting after each few paces to search the immediate neighborhood and detect any guiding sound, he was now on the same side of the lake as the girl, and coming perilously near. At each step, apparently, he found the growing obscurity more tantalizing. He still continued calling aloud: "Sylvia! Sylvia, I say! Chuck it, can't you? You must give in, you know. I'll be grabbin' you in a minute." There were not lacking muttered ejaculations, which showed that he was losing his temper.

Once he swore so emphatically that she thought he was acknowledging himself beaten; but some glimmering notion that she was crouching almost within reach, and would have the laugh of him in the morning, flogged him to fresh endeavor. Now he was

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within ten yards, eight, five! In another few seconds his hand might touch her, and she quivered at the thought. If concealment could not save her she must seek refuge in flight, since therein lay a sure means of escape. Not daring to delay, she tried to stand upright, but felt a pull on her dress as if a hand were detaining her. It was only a brier, insidiously entangled in a fold of her skirt; but she was rather excited now, and there was little to be gained by excess of caution, for any rapid movement must betray her. Stooping, she caught the thorn-laden branch and tore it out of the soft material.

FENLEY heard the ripping sound instantly.

"Ha! There you are, my beauty! Got you this time!" he cried, and plunged forward.

Sylvia sprang from her hiding-place like a frightened fawn and valiantly essayed the steep embankment. Therein she erred. She would have succeeded in evading her pursuer had she leaped down to the open strip of turf close to the water, dodging him before he realized what was happening. As it was, the briers spread a hundred cruel claws against her; with each upward step she encountered greater resistance; desperation only added to her panic, and she struggled frenziedly.

The man, unhampered by garments such as clogged each inch of Sylvia's path, pushed on with renewed ardor. He no longer spoke, for his hearing alone could help him now, the girl's black-robed form being utterly merged in the dense shadow cast by brushwood and cedars. He, however, was silhouetted against the luminous gray of the park, and Sylvia, casting a frantic glance over her shoulder, saw him distinctly. In her distress she fancied she could feel his hot breath on her neck; and when some unusually venomous branch clutched her across the knees, and rendered farther movement impossible until her dress was extricated, she wailed aloud in anger and dismay.

"How dare you!" she cried, and her voice was tremulous and broken. "I warn you that if you persist in following me I shall strike you!"

"Will you, by Jove!" cried Robert elatedly. "I'd risk more than that, my dear! A kiss for every blow! Only fair, you know! Eh, what?"

On he came. He was so near that in one active bound he would be upon her, but he advanced warily, with hands outstretched.

"Oh, what shall I do!" she sobbed. "Go back, you brute! I—I hate you. There are policemen in the wood. I'll scream for help!"

"No need, Miss Manning," said a calm voice which seemed to come from the circumambient air. "Don't cry out or be alarmed, no matter what happens!"

A hand, not Robert Fenley's, caught her shoulder in a reassuring grip. A tall figure brushed by, and she heard a curious sound that had a certain smack in it—a hard smack, combined with a thudding effect, as if some one had smitten a pillow with a fist. A fist it was assuredly, and a hard one; but it smote no pillow. With a gurgling cough, Robert Fenley toppled headlong to the edge of the lake, and lay there probably some minutes, for the man who had hit him knew how and where to strike.

Sylvia did not scream. She had recognized Trenholme's voice, but she felt absurdly like fainting. Perhaps she swayed slightly, and her rescuer was aware of it, for he gathered her up in his arms as he might carry a scared child, nor did he set her on her feet when they were clear of the trees and in the open park.

"You are quite safe now," he said soothingly. "You are greatly upset, of course, and you need a minute or two to pull yourself together; but no one will hurt you while I am here. When you feel able to speak, you'll tell me where to take you, and I'll be your escort."

"I can speak now, thank you," said Sylvia, with a composure that was somewhat remarkable. "Please put me down!"

He obeyed, but she imagined he gave her a silent hug before his clasp relaxed. Even then his left hand still rested on her shoulder in a protective way.

CHAPTER XIV

THE SPREADING OF THE NET

THAT John Trenholme should be in the right place at the right moment, and that the place should happen to be one where his presence was urgently required in Sylvia Manning's behalf, was not such a far-fetched coincidence as it might be deemed,

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for instance, by a jury. Juries are composed mainly of bald-headed men, men whose shining pates have been denuded of hair by years and experience, and these factors dry the heart as surely as they impoverish the scalp. Consequently, juries (in bulk, be it understood; individual jurors may, perhaps, retain the emotional equipment of a Chatterton) are skeptical when asked to accept the vagaries of the artistic temperament in extenuation of some so-called irrational action.

In the present case counsel for the defense would plead that his clients (Sylvia would undoubtedly figure in the charge) were moved by an overwhelming impulse shared in common. It was a glorious night, he might urge; each had been thinking of the other; each elected to stroll forth under the stars; their sympathies were linked by the strange circumstances which had led to the production of a noteworthy picture—what more likely than that they should visit the scene to which that picture owed its genesis?

Trenholme, it might be held, had not knowingly reached that stage of soul-sickness which brings the passionate cry to *Valentine's* lips:

> Except I be by Sylvia in the night,
> There is no music in the nightingale;
> Unless I look on Sylvia in the day,
> There is no day for me to look upon.

"But, gentlemen," the wily one would continue, "that indefinable excitation of the nervous system which is summed up in the one small word 'love' must have a beginning; and whether that beginning springs from spore or germ, it is admittedly capable of amazingly rapid growth. The male defendant may not even have been aware of its existence, but subsequent events establish the diagnosis beyond cavil; and I would remind you that the melodious lines I have just quoted could not have been written by our immortal bard, Shakespeare, if two gentlemen of Verona, and two Veronese ladies as well, had not yielded to influences not altogether unlike those which governed my clients on this memorable occasion."

Juries invariably treat Shakespeare's opinions with profound respect. They know they ought to be well acquainted with his "works," but they are not, and hope to conceal their ignorance by accepting the poet's philosophy without reservation.

If, however, owing to the forensic skill of an advocate, romance might be held accountable for the wanderings of John and Sylvia, what of Robert? He, at least, was not under its magic spell. He, when the fateful hour struck, was merely drinking himself drowsy. To explain *him*, witnesses would be needed, and who more credible than a Superintendent and Detective Inspector of the Criminal Investigation Department?

When Winter had smoked, and Furneaux had contributed some personal reminiscences the whole aim and object of which was the perplexing and mystification of that discreet person, Tomlinson, the two retired to their room at an early hour. The butler pressed them hospitably to try the house's special blend of Scotch whisky, but they had declined resolutely. Both acknowledged to an unwonted lassitude and sleepiness—symptoms which Hilton Fenley might expect and inquire about. When they were gone, the major domo sat down to review the day's doings.

His master's death at the hands of a murderer had shocked and saddened him far more than his manner betrayed. If some fantastic chain of events brought Tomlinson to the scaffold he would still retain the demeanor of an exemplary butler. But beneath the externals of his office he had a heart and a brain; and his heart grieved for a respected employer, and his brain told him that Scotland Yard was no wiser than he when it came to suspecting a likely person of having committed the crime, let alone arresting the suspect and proving his guilt.

Of course, therein Tomlinson was in error. Even butlers of renown have their limitations, and his stopped far short of the peculiar science of felon-hunting in which Winter and Furneaux were geniuses, each in his own line.

ASSUREDLY he would have been vastly astonished could he have seen their movements when the bedroom door closed on them. In fact, his trained ear might have found some new quality in such a commonplace thing as the closing of the door. Every lock and bolt and catch in The Towers was in perfect working order, yet the lock of this door failed to click, for the excellent reason that it was jammed by a tiny wedge. Hence, it could be opened noiselessly if need be; and lest a hinge might squeak each hinge was

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forthwith drenched with vaseline. Further, a tiny circlet of India rubber, equipped with a small spike, was placed between door and jamb.

Then, murmuring in undertones when they spoke, the detectives unpacked their portmanteaux. Winter produced no article out of the ordinary run, but Furneaux unrolled a knotted contrivance which proved to be a rope ladder.

"One or both of us may have to go out by the window," he said. "At any rate, we have Wellington's authority for the military axiom that a good leader always provides a line of retreat."

"I wonder what became of the rest of that wine?" said Winter, rolling the beer bottle in a shirt and stowing it away.

"I didn't dare ask. Tomlinson can put two and two together rather cleverly. He *almost* interfered when Harris brought the decanter, so I dropped the wine question like a hot potato."

"It had gone, though, when we came back from Robert's room. Hilton sent for it. Bet you another new hat he emptied——"

"You'll get no more new hats out of me," growled Furneaux savagely, giving an extra pressure to a pair of sharp hooks which gripped the window sill, and from which the rope ladder could be dropped to the ground instantly.

"Sorry. Where did you retrieve that dirty towel?" For the little man had taken from a pocket an object which merited the description, and was placing it in his bag.

"It's one of Hilton's. He used it to wipe bark moss off his clothes. Queer thing that such rascals always omit some trivial precaution. He should have burned the towel with the moccasins; but he didn't. This towel will help to strangle him."

"You're becoming a bloodthirsty detective," mused Winter aloud. "I've seldom seen you so vindictive. Why is it?"

"I dislike snakes, and this fellow is a poisonous specimen. If there were no snakes in the world, we should all be so happy!"

"Blessed if I see that."

"I have always suspected that your religious education had been neglected. Read the Bible and Milton. Then you'll understand; and incidentally speak and write better English."

"Can you suggest any means whereby I can grasp your jokes without being bored to weariness? They're more soporific than bromide. Anyhow, it's time we undressed."

Though the blind was drawn the window was open; there was no knowing who might be watching from the garden, so they went through all the motions of undressing and placed their boots outside the door.

Then the light was switched off, the blind raised, and they dressed again rapidly, donning other boots. Each pocketed an automatic pistol and an electric torch and, by preconcerted plan, Winter sat by the window and Furneaux by the door. It was then a quarter to eleven, and they hardly looked for any developments until a much later hour, but they neglected no precaution. Unquestionably it would be difficult for any one to move about in that part of the house, or cross the gardens without attracting their attention.

Their room was situated on the south front, two doors from Sylvia's, and two from Hilton Fenley's bedroom. The door lay in shadow beyond the range of the light burning in the hall. Sylvia's room was farther along the corridor. The door of Hilton's bedroom occupied the same plane; the door of his sitting-room faced the end of the corridor.

The walls were massive, as in all Tudor houses, and the doors so deeply recessed that there was space for a small mat in front of each. Ordinarily boots placed there were not visible in the line of the corridor, but the detectives' footgear stood well in view. There were two reasons for this. In the first place, Hilton Fenley might like to see them, so his highly probable if modest desire was gratified; secondly, when Parker visited Sylvia and quitted her, and when Sylvia went downstairs, Furneaux's head, lying between two pairs of boots, could scarcely be distinguished, while his scope of vision was only slightly, if at all, diminished.

Soon the girl's footsteps could be heard crossing the hall, and the raising of the drawing-room window and opening of the shutters were clearly audible. Winter, whose office had been a sinecure hitherto, now came into the scheme.

He saw Sylvia's slight form standing beneath, marked her hesitancy, and watched her slow progress down the terraces and into the park. This nocturnal enterprise on her part was rather perplexing, and he was in two minds whether or not to cross

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the room and consult with Furneaux, when the latter suddenly withdrew his head, closed the door, and hissed "Snore!"

Winter crept to a bed, and put up an artistic peformance, a duet, musical, regular, not too loud. In a little while his colleague's "S-s-t!" stopped him, and a slight crack of a finger against a thumb called him to the door, which was open again.

Explanation was needless. Hilton Fenley, like the other watchers, hearing the creaking of window and shutters, had looked out from his own darkened room. In all likelihood, thanking his stars for the happy chance given thus unexpectedly, he noted the direction the girl was taking, and acted as if prepared for this very development; the truth being, of course, that he was merely adapting his own plans to immediate and more favorable conditions.

Coming out into the corridor, he consulted his watch. Then he glanced in the direction of the room which held the two men he had cause to fear—such ample cause as he little dreamed of at that moment. To make assurance doubly sure, he walked that way, not secretly, but boldly, since it was part of his project now to court observation—by others, at any rate, if not by the drugged emissaries of Scotland Yard. He waited outside the closed door and heard what he expected to hear, the snoring of two men sound asleep.

Returning, he did not reënter his own room, but crossed the head of the staircase to Robert's. He knocked lightly, and his brother's "Hello, there! Come in!" reached Furneaux's ears. Not a word of the remainder of the colloquy that ensued was lost on either of the detectives.

"SORRY to disturb you, Bob," said Hilton, speaking from the doorway, "but I thought you might not be in bed, and I've come to tell you that Sylvia has just gone out by way of the drawing-room and is wandering about the park."

"Sylvia! On her lonesome?" was Robert's astounded cry.

"Yes. It isn't right. I can't understand her behavior. I would have followed her myself; but in view of your statement at dinner tonight, I fancied it would save some annoyance if I entrusted that duty to you."

"Look here, Hilton, old chap, are you really in earnest?"

"About Sylvia? Yes. I actually saw her. At this moment she is heading for the lake. If you hurry you'll see her yourself."

"I say, it's awfully decent of you. . . I take back a lot of what I said tonight. . . . Of course, as matters stand, this is *my* job. . . . Tell MacBain not to lock us out."

"I'll attend to that, if necessary. But don't mention me to Sylvia. She might resent the notion of being spied on. Say that you, too, were strolling about. You see, I heard the window being opened, and looked out, naturally. Anyhow, drop me, and run this affair on your own."

Robert was slightly obfuscated—the fresh air quickly made him worse—but he was sensible of having grossly misjudged Hilton.

"Right-O," he said, hurrying downstairs. "We'll have a talk in the mornin'. Dash it! It's twelve o'clock. That silly kid! What's she after, I'd like to know?"

Robert gone, Hilton returned to his own room and rang a bell. MacBain came, and was asked if he was aware that Miss Sylvia had quitted the house. MacBain gave his version of the story, and Fenley remarked that he might leave the window unfastened until he made his rounds at one o'clock.

Seemingly as an afterthought, Hilton mentioned his brother's open door, and MacBain discovered that Mr. Robert was missing also.

By that time the detectives, without exchanging a word, had each arrived at the same opinion as to the trend of events. Hilton Fenley was remodeling his projects to suit an unforeseen development. No matter what motive inspired Sylvia Manning's midnight ramble, there could be no disputing the influence which dominated Robert Fenley. He was his brother's catspaw. When his rifle was found next day MacBain's testimony would be a tremendous addition to the weight of evidence against him, since any unprejudiced judgment must decide that the pursuit of his "cousin" was a mere pretense to enable him to go out and search for the weapon he had foolishly left in the wood.

Hilton might or might not admit that he told Robert of the girl's escapade. If he did admit it, he might be trusted to give the incident the requisite kink to turn the scale against Robert. Surveying the facts with cold impartiality afterwards, Scotland Yard decided that while Hilton could not hope that Robert would be convicted of the murder, the latter would assuredly be suspected

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of it, perhaps arrested and tried; and in any event his marriage with Sylvia Manning would become a sheer impossibility.

Moreover, once the rifle was found by the police, the only reasonable prospect of connecting Hilton himself with the crime would have vanished into thin air. If that weapon were picked up in the Quarry Wood, or for that matter in any other part of the estate, the hounds of the law were beaten. Winter's level-headed shrewdness and Furneaux's almost uncanny intuition might have saddled Hilton with blood guiltiness, but a wide chasm must be bridged before they could provide the requisite proof of their theory.

In fact, thus far they dared not even hint at bringing a charge against him. To succeed, they had to show that the incredible was credible, that a murderer could be in a room within a few feet of his victim and in a wood distant fully four hundred yards. It was a baffling problem, not wholly incapable of solution by circumstantial evidence, but best left to be elucidated by Hilton Fenley himself. They believed now that he was about to oblige them by supplying that corroborative detail which, in the words of Pooh-bah, "lends verisimilitude to an otherwise bald and unconvincing narrative."

Winter drew Furneaux into the room, and breathed the words into his ear:

"You go. You stand less chance of being seen. I'll search his room."

"If there is a misfire, show a signal after five minutes."

"Right!"

Furneaux, standing back from the window, but in such a position that a light would be visible to any one perched on the rock in the wood, pressed the button of an electric torch three times rapidly. Then he lowered the rope ladder and clambered down with the nimbleness of a sailor. In all probability, Hilton Fenley was still talking to MacBain and creating the illusion that the last thing he would think of was a stroll out of doors at that late hour. But the little man took no chances. Having surveyed the ground carefully during the day, he was not bothered now by doubts as to the most practicable path.

Creeping close to the house till he reached the yew hedge, and then passing through an arch, he remained in the shadow of the hedge till it turned at a right angle in front of the Italian garden. From that point to the edge of the Quarry Wood was not a stone's throw, and clumps of rhododendrons and other flowering shrubs gave shelter in plenty. Arrived at the mouth of the footpath, which he had marked by counting the trees in the avenue, he halted and listened intently. There was no sound of rustling grass or crunched gravel. Hilton was taking matters leisurely. Fifteen minutes would give him ample time for the business he had in hand. Even if Robert and Sylvia reached home before him, which was unlikely—far more unlikely even than he imagined—he could say that he thought it advisable to follow his brother and help in the search for the girl. The same excuse would serve if he met any of those pestilential police prowling about the grounds. Indeed, he could despatch the alert and intelligent ones on the trail of the wanderers, especially on Robert's. In a word, matters were going well for Hilton, so well that Furneaux laughed as he turned into the wood.

HERE the detective had to advance with care. Beneath the trees the darkness was now so complete that it had that peculiar quality of density which every-day speech likens to a wall. Cats, gamekeepers, poachers, and other creatures of predatory and nocturnal habits can find and follow a definite track under such conditions; but detectives are nearly human, and Furneaux was compelled to use the torch more than once. He ran no risk in doing this. Hilton Fenley could not yet be in a position to catch the gleam of light among the trees. The one thing to avoid was delay, and Furneaux had gained rather than lost time, unless Fenley was running at top speed.

After crossing the damp hollow the Jerseyman had no further difficulty; he breasted the hill and kept a hand extended so as to avoid colliding with a tree trunk. Expecting at any instant to have a bull's eye lantern flashed in his eyes, which he did not want to happen, he said softly:

"Hi! You two! Don't show a light! How near are you?"

"Oh, it's you, sir?" said a voice. "We thought it would be. We saw the signal, and you said you might be the first to arrive."

"Any second signal?"

"No, sir."

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Furneaux recognized the pungent scent of the colza oil used in policemen's lamps.

"By gad," he said, "if the average criminal had the nose of the veriest cur dog he'd smell that oil a mile away. Now, where are you? There." He had butted into a constable's solid bulk. "Take me to the rock—quick. We must hide behind it, on the lower side. . . . Is this the place? Right! Squat down, both of you, and make yourselves comfortable, so that you won't feel your position irksome, and move perhaps at the wrong moment. When you feel me crawling away, follow to the upper foot of the rock—no farther.

"Stand upright then, and try to keep your joints from cracking. There must be no creaking of belts or boots. Absolute silence is the order. Not a word spoken. No matter what you hear, don't move again until you see the light of my electric torch. Then run to me, turning on your own lamps, and help in arresting any one I may be holding. Use your handcuffs if necessary, and don't hesitate to grab hard if there is a struggle. Remember, you are to arrest *any one*, no matter who it may be. Got that?"

"Yes, sir," came two eager voices.

"Don't be excited. It will be an easy thing. If we make a mistake, I bear the responsibility. Now, keep still as mice when they hear a cat."

One of the men giggled. Both constables had met Furneaux in the local police station that afternoon, as he had asked the Inspector to parade the pair who would be on duty during the night. It was then that he had arranged a simple code of flash signals, and warned them to look out for Winter or himself during the night. Any other person who turned up was not to be challenged until he reached the higher ground beyond the rock, but that instruction was to be acted on only in the unavoidable absence of one of the Scotland Yard officers. Privately, the constables hoped Furneaux would be their leader. They deemed him "a funny little josser," and marveled greatly at his manner and appearance. Still, they had heard of his reputation; the Inspector, in an expansive moment, had observed that "Monkey Face was sharper than he looked."

Thinking example better than precept, Furneaux did not reprove the giggler. Lying there, screened even in broad daylight by the bulk of the rock and some hazels growing vigorously in that restricted area owing to the absence of foliage overhead, he listened to the voices of the night, never dumb in a large wood. Birds fluttered uneasily on the upper branches of the trees—indeed, Furneaux was lucky in that the occasional gleam of the torch had not sent a pheasant hurtling off with frantic clamor ere ever the rendezvous was reached—and some winged creature, probably an owl, swept over the rock in stealthy flight. The rabbits were all out in the open, nibbling grass and crops at leisure, but there were other tiny forms rustling among the shrubs and scampering across the soft carpet of fallen leaves.

Twitterings, and subdued squeaks, and sudden rushes of pattering feet, the murmuring of myriad fronds in the placid breeze, the whispering of the neighboring elms, even the steady chant of the distant cascade—all swelled into a soft and continuous chorus, hardly heard by the country policemen, accustomed as they were to the sounds of a woodland at night, but of surprising volume and variety to the man whose forests lay in the paved wilderness of London.

Suddenly a twig cracked sharply and a match was struck. It was of the safety type and made little noise, but it was too much for the nerves of a bird, which flew away noisily. Furneaux pursed his lips and wanted to whistle. He realized now what an escape he had earlier. But the intruder seemed to care less about attracting attention than making rapid progress. He came on swiftly, striking other matches when required, until he stood on the bare ground near the rock. Not daring to lift a head, none of the three watchers could see the newcomer, and in that respect their hiding-place was almost too well chosen. Whoever it was, he needed no more matches to guide his footsteps. They heard him advancing a few paces; then he halted again. After a marked interval, punctuated by a soft, whirring noise hard to interpret, there were irregular scrapings and the creaking of a branch.

FURNEAUX arose. Keeping a hand on the rock until he was clear of the shrubs, he crept forward on thievish feet. His assistants, moving more clumsily to their allotted station, were audible enough to him, but to a man unconscious of their presence, and actively climbing a

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tree, they were remote and still as Uranus and Saturn.

The scraping of feet and heavy breathing, to say nothing of the prompt flight of several birds, led the detective unerringly to the trunk of a lofty chestnut which he had already fixed on as the cover whence the shot that killed Mortimer Fenley was fired. He was convinced also that the rifle was yet hidden there, and his thin lips parted in a smile now that his theory was about to be justified.

He could follow the panting efforts of the climber quite easily. He knew when the weapon was unlashed from the limb to which it was bound, and when the descent was begun. He could measure almost the exact distance of his prey from the ground, and was awaiting the final drop before flashing the torch on his prisoner, when something rapped him smartly on the forehead. It was a rope, doubled and twisted, and subsequent investigation showed that it must have been thrown in a coil over the lowermost branch in order to facilitate the only difficult part of the climb offered by ten feet of straight bole.

That trivial incident changed the whole course of events. Taken by surprise, since he did not know what had struck him, Furneaux pressed the governor of the torch a second too soon, and his eyes, raised instantaneously, met those of Hilton Fenley, who was on the point of letting go the branch and swinging himself down.

During a thrilling moment they gazed at each other, the detective cool and seemingly unconcerned, the self-avowed murderer livid with mortal fear. Then Furneaux caught the rope and held it.

"I thought you'd go climbing tonight, Fenley," he said. "Let me assist you. Tricky things, ropes. You're at the wrong end of this one."

Even Homer nods, but Furneaux had erred three times in as many seconds. He had switched on the light prematurely, and his ready banter had warned the parricide that a well built scheme was crumbling to irretrievable ruin. Moreover, he had underrated the nervous forces of the man thus trapped and outwitted. Fenley knew that when his feet touched the earth he would begin a ghastly pilgrimage to the scaffold. Two yellow orbs of light were already springing up the slight incline from the rock, betokening the presence of captors in overwhelming number. What was to be done? Nothing, in reason, yet Furneaux had likened him to a snake, and he displayed now the primal instinct of the snake to fight when cornered. Thrusting the heavy gun he was carrying straight downward, he delivered a vicious and unerring blow.

The stock caught the detective on the crown of the head, and he fell to his knees, dropping the torch, which of course went out as soon as the thumb relaxed its pressure.

CHAPTER XV

SOME STAGE EFFECTS

FENLEY himself dropped almost simultaneously with the rifle, landing with both feet on Furneaux's back, and thus completing the little man's discomfiture. By that time the two policemen were nearly upon him, but he was lithe and fierce as a cobra, and had seized the rifle again before they could close with him. Jabbing the nearer adversary with the muzzle, he smashed a lamp and sent its owner sprawling backward. Then, swinging the weapon, he aimed a murderous blow at the second constable.

The man contrived to avoid it to a certain extent, but it glanced off his left arm and caught the side of his head; and he, too, measured his length. All three, detective and police, were on their feet promptly, for none was seriously injured; but Furneaux was dazed and had to grope for the torch, and the second constable's lamp had gone out owing to a rush of oil from the cistern. Thus, during some precious seconds, they were in total darkness.

Meanwhile Fenley had escaped. Luck, after deserting him, had come to his rescue in the nick of time. He had blundered into the path, and managed to keep to it, and the somewhat strong language in which Furneaux expressed his feelings anent the Hertfordshire Constabulary, and the no less lurid comments of two angry members of the force, helped to conceal the sounds which would otherwise have indicated the direction taken by the fugitive.

At last, having found the torch, Furneaux collected his scattered wits.

"Now don't be scared and run away, you two," he said sarcastically, producing an automatic pistol. "I'm only going to tell Mr. Winter that we've bungled the job."

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He fired twice in the air, and two vivid spurts of flame rose high among the branches of the chestnut; but the loud reports of the shooting were as nothing compared with the din that followed. Every rook within a mile flew from its eyrie and cawed strenuously. Pheasants clucked and clattered in all directions, owls hooted, and dogs barked in the kennels, in the stable yard, and in nearly every house of the two neighboring villages.

"I don't see what good that'll do, sir," was the rueful comment of the policeman who had, in his own phrase, "collected a thick ear," and was now feeling the spot tenderly. "He hasn't shinned up the tree again; that's a positive certainty."

"I should have thought that a really clever fellow like you would guess that I wanted to raise a row," said Furneaux. "Have you breath enough left to blow your whistles?"

"But, sir, your orders were——"

"Blow, and be——to you. Don't I know the fault is mine! Blow, and crack your cheeks! Blow wild peals, my Roberts, else we are copped coppers!"

The mild radiance of the torch showed that the detective's face was white with fury and his eyes gleaming red. To think that a dangling rope's end should have spoiled his finest capture, undone a flawless piece of imaginative reasoning which his own full record had never before equaled! It was humiliating, maddening. No wonder the policemen thought him crazy!

But they whistled with a will. Winter heard them, and was stirred to strange activities. Robert Fenley, recovering from an ague and sickness, heard and marveled at the pandemonium which had broken loose in the park. The household at The Towers was aroused, heads were craned out of windows, women screamed, and men dressed hastily. Keepers, estate hands, and stablemen tumbled into their garments and hurried out, armed with guns and cudgels. An unhappy woman, tossing in the fitful dreams of drug-induced sleep, was awakened by the pistol shots and terrified by the noise of slamming doors and hurrying feet.

She struggled out of bed and screamed for an attendant, but none came. She pressed an electric bell, which rang continuously in the night watchman's room; but he had run to the front of the house and was unlocking the front door, where a squad of willing men soon awaited Winter's instructions. For the Superintendent, after rushing to the telephone, had shouted an order to MacBain before he made off in the direction of the Quarry Wood.

The one tocsin which exercises a dread significance in a peaceful and law-abiding English community at the present day struck a new and awful note in Hilton Fenley's brain. Fool that he was, why had he fought? Why was he flying? Had he brazened it out, the police would not have dared arrest him. His brain was as acute as the best of theirs. He could have evolved a theory of the crime as subtle as any detective's, and who so keen-witted as a son eager to avenge a father's murder? But he had thrown away a gambler's chance by a moment of frenzied struggle. He was doomed now. No plausible explanation would serve his need. He was hunted. The pack was after him. The fox had broken cover, and the hounds were in full cry.

Whither should he go? He knew not. Still clutching the empty gun—for which he had not even one cartridge in his pockets—he made hopelessly for the open park. Already some glimmer of light showed that he was winning free of these accursed trees, which had stretched forth a thousand hands to tear his flesh and trip his uncertain feet. That way, at least, lay the world. In the wood he might have circled blindly until captured.

NOW a drawback of such roaring maelstroms of alarm and uncertainty is their knack of submerging earlier and less dramatic passages in the lives of those whom Fate drags into their sweeping currents. Lest, therefore, the strangely contrived meeting between Sylvia and her knight errant should be neglected by the chronicler, it is well to return to those two young people at the moment when Sylvia was declaring her unimpaired power of standing without support.

Trenholme was disposed to take everything for the best in a magic world. "What ever is, is right" is a doctrine which appeals to the artistic temperament, inasmuch as it blends fatalism and the action of Providence in proportions so admirably adjusted that no philosopher yet born has succeeded in reducing them to a formula. But Eve did not bite the apple in that spirit. It was

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forbidden: she wanted to know why. Sylvia's first thought was to discover a reasonable reason for Trenholme's presence. Of course, there was one that jumped to the eye, but it was too absurd to suppose that he had come to the tryst in obedience to the foolish vagaries which accounted for her own actions. She blushed to the nape of her neck at the conceit, which called for instant and severe repression, and her voice reflected the passing mood.

"I don't wish to underrate the great service you have rendered me," she said coldly, "and I shall always be your debtor for it; but I can not help asking how you came to be standing under the cedars at this hour of the night?"

"I wonder," he said.

She wriggled her shoulder slightly, as a polite intimation that his hand need not rest there any longer, but he seemed to misinterpret the movement, and drew her an inch or so nearer, whereupon the wriggling ceased.

"But that is no answer at all," she murmured, aware of a species of fear of this big, masterful man: a fear rather fascinating in its tremors, like a novice's cringing to the vibration of electricity in a mildly pleasant form; a fear as opposed to her loathing of Robert Fenley as the song of a thrush to the purr of a tiger.

"I can tell you, in a disconnected sort of way," he said, evidently trying to focus his thoughts on a problem set by the gods, and which, in consequence, was incapable of logical solution by a mere mortal. "It was a fine night. I felt restless. The four walls of a room were prison-like. I strolled out. I was thinking of you. I am here."

She trembled a little. Blushing even more deeply than before, she fancied he must be able to feel her skin hot through silk and linen. For all that, she contrived to laugh.

"It sounds convincing, but there is something missing in the argument," she said.

"Most likely," he admitted. "A woman analyzes emotion far more intimately than a man. Perhaps, if you were to tell me why *you* were drawn to cross the park at midnight, you might supply a clue to my own moon madness."

"But there isn't any moon, and I think I ought to be returning to the house."

He knew quite well that she had evaded his question, and, so readily does the heart respond to the whisperings of hope, he was aware of a sudden tumult in that which doctors call the cardiac region. She, too, had come forth to tell her longings to the stars! That thrice blessed picture had drawn them together by a force as unseen and irresistible as the law of gravitation! Then he became aware of a dreadful qualm. Had he any right to place on her slim shoulders the weight of an avowal from which he had flinched? He dropped that protecting hand as if it had been struck sharply.

"I have annoyed you by my stupid word-fencing," he said contritely.

"No, indeed," she said, and, reveling in a new sense of power, her tone grew very gentle. "Why should we seek far-fetched theories for so simple a thing as a stroll out of doors on a night like this? I am not surprised that you, at any rate, should wish to visit the place where that delightful picture sprang into being. It was my exceeding good fortune that you happened to be close at hand when I needed help. I must explain that——"

"My explanation comes first," he broke in. "I saw you crossing the park. A second time in the course of one day I had to decide whether to remain hidden or make a bolt for it. Again I determined to stand fast; for had you seen and heard a man vanishing among the trees you would certainly have been alarmed, not only because of the hour but owing to today's extraordinary events. Moreover, I felt sure you were coming to the lake, and I did not wish to stop you. That was a bit of pure selfishness on my part. I wanted you to come. If ever a man was vouchsafed the realization of an unspoken prayer, I am that man tonight."

TRENHOLME had never before made love to any woman, but lack of experience did not seem to trouble him greatly. Sylvia, however, though very much alive to that element in his words, bethought herself of something else which they implied.

"Then you heard what my cousin Robert said?" she commented.

"Every syllable. When the chance of an effectual reply offered, I recalled his disjointed remarks collectively."

"Did you hit him very hard?"

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"Just hard enough to stop him from annoying you further tonight."

"I suppose he deserved it. He was horrid. But I don't wish you to meet him again just now. He is no coward, and he might attack you."

"That would be most unfortunate," he agreed.

"So, if you don't mind, we'll take a round-about way. By skirting the Quarry Wood we can reach the avenue, near the place where we met this evening. Do you remember?"

"Perfectly. I shall be very old before I forget."

"But I mean the place where we met. Of course, you could hardly pretend that you had forgotten meeting me."

"As soon would the daffodil forget where last it bloomed.

"Daffodils,
That come before the swallow dares, and take
The winds of March with beauty.

"Not that I should quote you 'A Winter's Tale,' but rather search my poor store for apter lines from 'A Midsummer Night's Dream':

"I know a bank whereon the wild thyme blows,
Where ox-lips and the nodding violet grows;
Quite over-canopied with luxurious woodbine,
With sweet musk roses, and with eglantine:
There sleeps Titania.

"Believe me, I have an excellent memory —for some things."

They walked together in silence a little way, and dreamed, perchance, that they were wandering in Oberon's realm with Hermia and Lysander. Then Sylvia, stealing a shy glance at the tall figure by her side, acknowledged that once she filled the role of Titania in a schoolroom version of the play.

"We had no man," she said, "but the masks and costumes served us well. After a day's study I could be a Fairy Queen once more.

"I pray thee, gentle mortal, sing again;
Mine ear is much enraptured of thy note——"

She stopped suddenly. The next lines were distinctly amorous. He laughed with ready appreciation of her difficulty, but generously provided a way out.

"Poor mortal!" he tittered. "And must I wear an ass's head to be in character?"

A loud report, and then another, brought them back rudely from a make-believe wood near Athens to a peril-haunted park in an English county. For the second time that night Sylvia knew what fear meant. Intuitively, she shrank close to the strong man who seemed destined to be her protector; and when an arm clasped her again, she cowered close to its sheltering embrace.

"Oh, what is it?" she wailed in terror.

"It is hard to say," he answered quietly, and the confidence in his voice was the best assurance of safety he could have given. "Those shots were fired from some sort of rifle, not of the same caliber as that which was used this morning, but unquestionably a rifle. Perhaps it is one of these modern pistols. I don't wish to alarm you needlessly, Miss Manning, but there is some probability that the police have discovered the man who killed Mr. Fenley, and there is a struggle going on. At any rate, let us remain out here in the open. We shall be as safe here as anywhere."

Sylvia, who had not been afraid to venture alone into the park at midnight, was now in a quite feminine state of fright. She clung to Trenholme without any pretense of other feeling than one of unbounded trust. Her heart was pounding frantically, and she was trembling from head to foot.

The police whistles were shrilling their insistent summons for help, and Trenholme knew that the commotion had arisen in the exact part of the Quarry Wood whence the murderous bullet had sped that morning. He was unarmed, of course, being devoid of even such a mildly aggressive weapon as a walking-stick, but there was doubt in his mind that the best thing to do was to stand fast. He was not blind to the possibility of imminent danger, for the very spot they had reached lay in a likely line of retreat for any desperado whom the police might have discovered and be pursuing. Naturally he took it for granted that the criminal had fired the two shots, and the fact that the whistles were still in full blast showed that the chase had not been abandoned.

Still, the only course open was to take such chances as came their way. He could always shield the girl with his own body, or tell her to lie flat on the ground while he closed with an assailant if opportunity served. Being a level-headed, plucky

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youngster, he was by no means desirous of indulging in deeds of derring-do. The one paramount consideration was the safe conduct of Sylvia to the house, and he hoped sincerely that if a miscreant were trying to escape, he would choose any route save that which led from the wood to Roxton village.

"Don't hesitate if I bid you throw yourself down at full length," he said, unconsciously stroking Sylvia's hair with his free hand. "In a minute or two we'll make for the avenue. Meanwhile, let us listen. If any one is coming in this direction we ought to hear him, and forewarned is forearmed."

Choking back a broken question, she strove submissively to check her distressed sobbing. Were it not for the hubbub of thousands of rooks and pheasants they would assuredly have caught the sounds of Hilton Fenley's panic-stricken onrush through the trees. As it was, he saw them first, and, even in his rabid frenzy, recognized Sylvia. It was only to be expected that he should mistake Trenholme for his brother, and in a new spasm of fright, he recollected that he was carrying the rifle. Robert Fenley, of course, would identify it at a glance, and could hardly fail to be more than suspicious at sight of it. With an oath, he threw the telltale weapon back among the undergrowth, and, summoning the last shreds of his shattered nerves to lend some degree of self-control, walked rapidly out into the open park.

Sylvia saw him and shrieked. Trenholme was about to thrust her behind him, when some familiar attributes about the outline of the approaching figure caused her to cry—

"Why, it's Hilton!"

"Yes, Sylvia," came the breathless answer. "You heard the firing, of course? The police have found some fellow in the wood. You and Bob make for the avenue. I'm going this way in case he breaks cover for the Roxton gate. Hurry! You'll find some of the men there. Never mind about me. I'll be all right!"

He was running while he talked, edging away toward the group of cedars; and, under the conditions, it was not for Trenholme to undeceive him as to the mistake in regarding the artist as Robert Fenley. In any event, the appearance of Hilton from that part of the wood seemed to prove that the man whom the law was seeking could not be in the same locality, so Trenholme did not hesitate to urge Sylvia to fall in with her "cousin's" instructions.

FOR the time, then, they may be left to progress uninterruptedly to safety and not very prompt enlightenment; the flight of the self-confessed murderer calls for more immediate attention. Probably, after the first moment of suspense, and when he was sure that escape was still not utterly impracticable, he intended to cross the park to the northwest and climb the boundary wall. But a glimpse of the black line of trees daunted him. He simply dared not face those pitiless sentinels again. He pictured himself forcing a way through the undergrowth in the dense gloom and failing perhaps; for the vegetation was wilder there than in any other portion of the estate. So, making a détour, he headed for the unencumbered parkland once more, and gained the wall near Jackson's farm about the time that Trenholme and Sylvia entered the avenue.

He was unquestionably in a parlous state. Bare-headed, unarmed, he could not fail to attract attention in a district where every resident knew the other, nor could he resist capture when the hue and cry went forth. What to do he knew not. Even if he managed to reach the railway station unchallenged, the last train of the day had left for London soon after eleven, and the earliest next morning was timed for five o'clock, too late by many hours to serve his desperate need.

Could he hire a motor car or bicycle? The effort was fraught with every variety of risk. There was a small garage at Easton, but those cunning detectives would be raising the countryside already, and the telephone would close every outlet. For the first time in his life Hilton Fenley realized that the world is too small to hold a murderer. He was free, would soon have the choice of a network of main roads and lanes in a rural district at the dead hour of the night, yet he felt himself securely caged as some creature of the jungle trapped in a pit.

Crossing Jackson's farmyard, not without disturbing a dog just quieting down after the preceding racket, he hurried into the village street, having made up his mind to face the inevitable and arouse the garage keeper. By the irony of fate he

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passed the cottage in which Police Constable Farrow was lying asleep and utterly unaware of the prevalent excitement, to join in which he would have kept awake all that night and the next.

Then the turn of Fortune's wheel befriended Fenley again. Outside a house stood Dr. Stern's car, a closed-in runabout, in which both the doctor and his chauffeur were sheltered from inclement weather. The chauffeur was lounging on the pavement, smoking a cigarette, and Fenley, of course, recognized him. His heart leaped. Let him be bold now, and he might win through. A handkerchief wiped some of the blood off his face where the skin had been broken by the trees, and he avoided the glare of the lamps.

"Hello, Tom," he said, "where is the doctor?"

"Inside, sir," with a glance toward an upper room where a light shone. "What's happened at The Towers, sir? Was it shooting I heard a while since?"

"Yes. A false alarm, though. The police thought they had found some suspicious character in the grounds."

"By jing, sir, did they fire at him?"

Fenley saw that the story was weak, and hastened to correct it.

"No, no," he said. "The police don't shoot first. That was my brother, Robert. You know what a hairbrained fellow he is. Said he fired in order to make the man double back. But that is a small matter. Can I have one word with Dr. Stern?"

"I'll see, sir," and the chauffeur went to the house.

Furneaux had estimated Hilton Fenley correctly in ascribing to him the quality of cold-bloodedness. Ninety-nine men among a hundred would have appropriated the motor car then and there, but Fenley saw by waiting a minute and displaying the requisite coolness he might succeed in throwing his pursuers off the trail for some hours.

Stern came. It chanced that he was watching a good patient through a crisis, and would be detained until daybreak.

"Hello, Hilton," he cried. "What's up now, and what's the racket in the park?"

Fenley explained, but hurried to the vital matter.

"My car is out of action," he said. "I was going to the Easton garage to hire one when I saw yours standing here. Lend it to me for a couple of hours; there's a good fellow. I'll pay well for the use of it."

"Pay? Nonsense! Jump in! Take Mr. Fenley where he wants to go, Tom. Where to first, Hilton?"

"St Albans. I'm exceedingly obliged. And look here, Stern, I insist on paying."

"We can settle that afterwards. Off with you. I'll walk home, Tom."

Away sped the car. Running through Easton, Fenley saw two policemen stationed at a crossroad. They signaled the car to stop, and his blood curdled, but, in the same instant, they saw the chauffeur's face; the other occupant was cowering as far back in the shadow as possible.

"Oh, it's Dr. Stern," said one. "Right, Tom. By the way, have you seen anything of——"

"Go on, do!" growled Fenley, drowning the man's voice. "I'm in a vile hurry."

That was his last real hairbreadth escape —for that night, at any rate, though other thrills were in store. The chauffeur was greatly surprised when bidden to go on from St. Albans to London, and take the High Barnet road to the City; but Fenley produced a five-pound note at the right moment, and the man reflected that his master would not hesitate to oblige a wealthy client, who evidently meant to make good the wear and tear of the car.

In about an hour Fenley alighted on the pavement opposite the firm's premises in Bishopsgate Street. If a policeman had chanced to be standing there the fugitive would have known that the game was up, but the only wayfarers in that part of the thoroughfare were some street cleaners.

Now that he saw a glimmer of light where hitherto all was darkness, he was absolutely clear-brained and cool in manner.

"Wait five minutes," he said. "I shan't detain you longer."

He let himself in with a master key, taken from his dead father's pockets earlier by Tomlinson. Going to the banker's private office, he ransacked a safe and a cabinet with hasty method. He secured a hat, an overcoat, an umbrella and a packed suitcase, left there for emergency journeys in connection with the business, and was back in the street again within less than the specified time.

His tongue clave to the roof of his mouth when he found a policeman chatting with the chauffeur, but the man saluted him with a civil "Good morning!"

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In the City of London, which is deserted as a cemetery from ten o'clock at night till six in the morning, the police keep a sharp eye on waiting cabs and automobiles between these hours, and invariably inquire their business.

This constable was quite satisfied that all was well when he saw Mr. Hilton Fenley, whom he knew by sight. In any event, the flying murderer was safer than he dared hope in that place and at that time. The Roxton telephonic system was broken down temporarily in so far as it affected his movements; for a fire had broken out at The Towers, and the flames of the burning roof had been as a beacon for miles around during nearly the whole of the time consumed by the run to London.

CHAPTER XVI

THE CLOSE OF A TRAGEDY

WINTER was in the Quarry Wood and feeling his way by trusting to hands and feet when he heard, and soon saw, Furneaux and the two constables coming toward him. The little detective held the electric torch above his head, and was striding on without looking to right or left. The bitterness of defeat was in his face. Life had turned to gall and wormwood. As the expressive American phrase has it, he was chewing mud.

The Superintendent smiled. He knew what torment his friend was suffering.

"Hello, there!" he said gruffly, and the three men jumped, for their nerves were on edge.

"Oh, it's you, Napoleon," yelped Furneaux. "Behold Soult and his army corps, come to explain how Sir John Moore dodged him at Corunna."

"You've lost your man, then?"

"Botched the job at the moment of victory. And all through a rope end."

"Tush! That isn't in your line."

"Must I be lashed by your wit, too? The rope was applied to me, not to Fenley."

"You don't mean to say, sir," broke in one of the astounded policemen, "that you think Mr. Hilton killed his own father!"

"Was it you who got that punch in the tummy?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, save your breath. You'll want it when the muscles stiffen. *'Cré nom d'un pipe!* To think that I, Furneaux of the Yard, should queer the finest pitch I ever stood on."

"Oh, come now, Charles," said Winter. "Don't cry over spilt milk. You'll catch Fenley all right before the weather changes. What really happened?"

Aware of the paramount necessity of suppressing his personal wos, Furneaux at once gave a graphic and succinct account of Fenley's imminent capture and escape. He was scrupulously fair, and exonerated his assistants from any share of the blame—if indeed any one could be held accountable for the singular accident which precipitated matters by a few vital seconds.

Had Fenley reached the ground before the torch revealed the detective's presence, the latter would have closed with him instantly, throwing the torch aside, and thus taking the prisoner at the disadvantage which the fortune of war had brought to bear against the law. Furneaux was wiry though slight, and he could certainly have held his man until reënforcements came; nor would the constables' lamps have been extinguished during the *mêlée*.

"Then he has vanished, rifle and all," said Winter, when Furneaux had made an end.

"As though the earth had swallowed him. A thousand years ago it would have done so," was the humiliated confession.

"None of you have any notion which direction he took?"

"*I* received such a whack on the skull that I believe he disappeared in fire," said Furneaux. "My friend here," turning to the policeman who had voiced his amazement at the suggestion that Hilton Fenley was a murderer, "was in the position of Bret Harte's negro lecturer on geology, while this other stalwart thought he had been kicked by a horse. We soon recovered, but had to grope for each other. Then I called the heavens to witness that I was dished."

"That gave us a chance of salvage, anyhow," said Winter. "I phoned the Roxton Inspector, and he will block the roads. When he has communicated with St. Albans and some other centers we should have a fairly wide net spread. Bates is coming from the lodge to take charge of a search party to scour the woods. We want that rifle. He must have dropped it somewhere. He'll make for a station in the early morning.

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He daren't tramp the country without a hat and in a black suit."

Winter was trying to put heart into his colleague, but Furneaux was not to be comforted. The truth was that the blow on the head had been a very severe one. Unfortunately, he had changed his hard straw hat for a soft cap which gave hardly any protection. Had Fenley's perch been a few inches lower when he delivered that vindictive thrust, Scotland Yard would probably have lost one of its most zealous officers.

SO THE Jerseyman said nothing, having nothing to say that was fit for the ears of the local constabulary, and Winter suggested that they should return to the mansion and give Bates instructions. Then he, Winter, would telephone headquarters, have the main roads watched, and the early Continental trains kept under surveillance.

Furneaux, torch in hand, at once led the way. Thus the party was visible before it entered the avenue, and two young people who had bridged months of ordinary acquaintance in one moment of tragedy, being then on the roadway, saw the gleam of light and waited.

"Good!" cackled the little detective when his glance fell on them. "I'm glad to see there's one live man in the bunch. I presume you've disposed of Mr. Robert Fenley, Mr. Trenholme?"

"Yes," said the artist. "His affairs seem to be common property. His brother evidently knew he was out of doors, and now you——"

Furneaux woke up at that.

"His brother! How can *you* know what his brother knew?"

"Mr. Hilton Fenley saw Miss Manning and myself, and mistook me for——"

"Saw you? When?"

"About five minutes ago, on the other side of the wood."

"What did he say? Quick!"

"He told us that the shooting was the outcome of your efforts to catch some man hiding among the trees."

"Of my efforts?"

"He didn't mention you by name. The words he used were 'the police.' He was taking part in the chase, I suppose."

"Which way did he go?"

Trenholme hesitated. Not only was he not quite conversant with the locality, but his shrewd wits had reached a certain conclusion, and he did not wish to be too outspoken before Sylvia. Surely she had borne sufficient for one day.

Thereupon the girl herself broke in.

"Hilton went toward the cedars. He may be making for the Easton gate. Have you caught any man?"

"Not yet, Miss Manning," said Winter, assuming control of the situation with a firm hand. "I advise you to go straight to your room, and not stir out again tonight. There will be no more disturbance—I promise you that."

Even the chief of the C. I. D. can err when he prophesies. At that instant the two lines of trees lost their impenetrable blackness. Their foliage sprang into red-tinted life as if the witches of the Brocken had chosen a new meeting-place, and a crackling, tearing sound rent the air.

"Oh!" screamed Sylvia, who chanced to be facing the mansion. "The house is on fire!"

They were standing in a group, almost where Police Constable Farrow had stood at ten minutes past ten the previous morning. Hence they were aware of this addition to the day's horrors before the house servants, who, headed by Tomlinson, were gathered on and near the flight of steps at the entrance. Every female servant in the establishment was there as well, not outside the door, but quaking in the hall. MacBain was the first among the men to realize what was happening. He caught the loud clang of an automatic fire alarm ringing in his room, and at once called the house fire brigade to run out the hose while he dashed upstairs into the north corridor, from which a volume of smoke was pouring.

"Good Heavens!" he cried, on reaching the cross gallery. "It's in Mr. Fenley's rooms!"

Mr. Fenley's rooms! No need to tell the horrified staff which rooms he meant. A fire was raging in the private suite of the dead man!

The residence was singularly well equipped with fire-extinguishing appliances; Mortimer Fenley had seen to that. Hand grenades, producing carbonic acid gas generated by mixing water with acid and alkali, were stored in convenient places, and there was a plentiful supply of water from many hose pipes. The north and south galleries looked on to an internal courtyard, so

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there was every chance of isolating the outbreak if it were tackled vigorously; and no fault could be found with either the spirit or the training of the amateur brigade. Consequently, only two rooms, a bedroom and adjoining dressing-room, were well alight; these were burned out completely. A sitting-room on one side was badly scorched, as was a spare room on the other; but the men soon knew that they had checked the farther progress of the flames, and were speculating, while they worked, as to the cause of a fire originating in a set of empty apartments, when Parker, Mrs. Fenley's personal attendant, came sobbing and distraught to Sylvia.

"Oh, miss!" she cried. "Oh, miss! Where is your aunt?"

"Isn't Mrs. Fenley in her room?" asked the girl, yielding to a sense of neglect in not having gone to see if Mrs. Fenley was alarmed, though the older woman was not in the slightest danger. The two main sections of the building were separated by an open space of forty feet, and The Towers had exceedingly thick walls.

"No, miss. I can't find her anywhere!" said the woman, well aware that if any one was at fault it was herself. "You know when I saw you. I went back then, and she was sleeping, so I thought I could leave her safely. Oh, miss, what has become of her? Maybe she was aroused by the shooting!"

ALL hands that could be spared from the fire-fighting operations engaged instantly in an active search, but there was no clue to Mrs. Fenley's disappearance beyond an open door and a missing night light. The electric current was shut off at the main at midnight, except on a special circuit communicating with the hall, the courtyard, and MacBain's den, where he had control of these things.

High and low they hunted without avail, until MacBain himself stumbled over a calcined body in the murdered banker's bedroom. The poor creature had waked to some sense of disaster. Vague memories of the morning's horror had led her, night light in hand, to the spot where she fancied she would find the one person on earth in whom she placed confidence, for Mortimer Fenley had always treated her with kindness, even if his methods were not in accord with the commonly accepted moral code.

Presumably, on discovering that the rooms were empty, some further glimmering of knowledge had stirred her benumbed consciousness. She may have flung herself on the bed in a paroxysm of weeping, heedless of the overturned night light and the havoc it caused. That, of course, is sheer guesswork, though the glass dish which held the light was found later on the charred floor, which was protected, to some extent, by a thick carpet.

At any rate, she had not long survived the husband who had given her a pomp and circumstance for which she was ill fitted. They were buried in the same grave, and Hertfordshire sent its thousands to the funeral.

Soon after her fate became known, Winter wanted Furneaux, but his colleague was not in the house. The telephone having broken down, owing to the collapse of a standard, and the necessity of subduing the fire having put a stop to any immediate search being made in the park, Winter thought that the pair of them would be better employed if they transferred their energies to the local police station.

He found Furneaux seated on the lowermost step at the entrance; the Jerseyman was crying as if his heart would break, and Trenholme was trying to comfort him, but in vain.

"What's up now?" inquired the Superintendent, thinking at the moment that his friend and comrade was giving way to hysteria indirectly owing to the blow he had received.

Furneaux looked up. It was the darkest hour of the night, and his chief could not see the distraught features wrung with pain.

"James," he said, mastering his voice by a fierce effort, "my mad antics killed that unfortunate woman! She was aroused by the shots. She would cry for help, and none came. Heavens! I can hear her now! Then she ran for refuge to the man who has been everything to her since she was a barrack room kid in India. I'm done, old fellow. I resign. I can never show my face in the Yard again."

"It'll do you a world of good if you talk," said Winter, meaning to console, but unconsciously wounding by cruel sarcasm.

"I'll be dumb enough after this night's

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vork," said Furneaux, in a tone of such ut-
er dejection that Winter began to take
iim seriously.

"If you fail me now, Charles," he said,
ınd his utterance was thick with anger at
he crassness of things, "I'll consider the
ıdvisability of sending in my own papers.
Dash it!" He said something quite differ-
ent, but his friends may read this record,
ınd they would repudiate an exact version
with scorn and disbelief. "Are we going to
admit ourselves beaten by a half-bred
hound like Hilton Fenley? Not if I know
it, or I know you. We've got the noose
'round his neck, and you and I will pull it
tight if we have to follow him to——"

"Pardon the interruption, gentlemen,"
said a voice. "I was called out o' bed to
come to the fire, an' took a short cut across
the park. Blow me if I didn't kick my foot
against this!"

And Police Constable Farrow, who had
approached unnoticed, held out an object
which seemed to be a rifle. Owing to his
being seated, Furneaux's eyes were on a
level with it, and he could see more clearly
than the others. He struck a match; then
there could be no doubt that the policeman
had actually picked up the weapon which
had set in motion so many and such varied
vicissitudes.

But Farrow had more to say. It had
been his happy lot during many hours to
figure bravely in the Fenley case, and he
carried himself as a valiant man and true
to the end.

"I think I heard you mention Mr. Hil-
ton," he went on. "I met Dr. Stern in
the village, an' he tol' me Mr. Hilton had
borrowed his car."

Furneaux stood up.

"Continue, Solomon," he said, and Win-
ter sighed with relief; the little man was
himself again.

"That's all, gentlemen, or practically all.
It struck me as unusual, but Dr. Stern said
Mr. Hilton's motor was out o' gear, an' he
wanted a car in a desp'rit hurry."

"He did, indeed!" growled Furneaux.
"You're quite sure there is no mistake?"

"Mistake, sir? How could there be?
The doctor was walkin' home. That's an
unusual thing. He never walks a yard if
he can help it. Mr. Hilton borrowed the
car to go to St. Albans."

"Did he, indeed? Just how did he come
to find the car waiting for him?"

"Oh, that's the queer part of it. Dr.
Stern is lookin' after poor old Joe Bland,
who's mighty bad with—there, now, if I
haven't gone and forgotten the name; some-
thing-itis—and Mr. Hilton must have
seen the car stannin' outside Bland's house.
But what was he doin' in Roxton at arf
past twelve? That's wot beats me. And
then, just fancy me stubbin' my toe against
this!"

Again he displayed the rifle as if it
were an exhibit and he were giving evi-
dence.

"Let's go inside and get a light," said
Winter, and the four mounted the steps
into the hall. Robert Fenley was there—
red-faced as ever, for he had helped in put-
ting out the fire, but quite sober, since he
had been very sick.

Some lamps and candles gave a fair
amount of light, and Robert eyed Tren-
holme viciously.

"SO IT was you!" he said. "I
thought it was. Well, my father
and mother are both dead, and this
is no time for settlin' matters; but I'll look
you up when this business is all over."

"If you do, you'll get hurt," said Winter
bruskly. "Is that your rifle?" and he point-
ed to the weapon in Farrow's hands.

"Yes. Where was it found?"

"In the Quarry Wood, sir, but a'most in
the park," said the policeman.

"Has it been used recently?"

Fenley could hardly have put a question
better calculated to prove his own inno-
cence of any complicity in the crime.

Winter took the gun, meaning to open
the breech, but he and Furneaux simul-
taneously noticed a bit of black thread tied
to one of the triggers. It had been broken,
and the two loose ends were some inches in
length.

"That settles it," muttered Furneaux.
"The scoundrel fixed it to a thick branch,
aimed it carefully on more than one occa-
sion—look at the sights, set for four hun-
dred yards—and fired it by pulling a cord
from his bedroom window when he saw his
father occupying the exact position where
the sighting practised on Monday and
Tuesday showed that a fatal wound would
be inflicted. The remaining length of cord
was stronger than this packing thread,
which was bound to give way first when
force was applied. . . . Well, that side of

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the question didn't bother us much, did it, Winter?"

"May I ask who you're talking about?" inquired Robert Fenley hoarsely.

"About that precious rogue, your half-brother," was the answer. "That is why he went to his bedroom, one window of which looks out on the park and the other on the east front, where he watched his father standing to light a cigar before entering the motor. He laid the cord before breakfast, knowing that Miss Manning's habit of bathing in the lake would keep gardeners and others from that part of the grounds. When the shot was fired he pulled in the cord——"

"I saw him doing that," interrupted Trenholme, who, after one glance at the signs of his handiwork on Robert Fenley's left jaw, had devoted his attention to the extraordinary story revealed by the detectives.

"You *saw* him!" And Furneaux wheeled round in sudden wrath. "Why the deuce didn't you tell me that?"

"You never asked me."

"How could I ask you such a thing? Am I a necromancer, a wizard, or eke a thought reader?"

Trenholme favored the vexed little man with a contemplative look.

"I think you are all those, and a jolly clever art critic as well," he said.

Furneaux was discomfited, and Winter nearly laughed. But the matter at issue was too important to be treated with levity.

"Tell us now what you saw, Mr. Trenholme," he said.

"When the shot was fired, I recognized it as coming from a high-velocity rifle," said the artist. "I was surprised that such a weapon should be used in an enclosed park of this nature, and looked toward the house to discover whether or not any heed would be given to the incident there. From where I was seated I could see the whole of the south front, but not the east side, where the brass fittings of the automobile alone were visible, glinting through and slightly above a yew hedge.

"Now, when Miss Manning returned to the house and entered by way of a window on the ground floor, I noticed that no other window was open. But, after the report of the gun, I saw the end window of the first floor on the southeast side slightly raised—say six inches; and some one in the room was, as I regarded it, gesticulating, or making signs. That continued nearly half a minute and then ceased. I don't know whether the person behind the glass was a man or a woman, but some one was there and engaged in the way I have described. If your theory is correct, the motions would be precisely those you suggest, similar to those of a fisherman reeling in a line."

"Your simile happens to be exact," said Winter. "While Hilton Fenley and my friend here were having a dust-up in the Quarry Wood I searched his rooms; and among other things I came upon a salmon reel carrying an exceptional quantity of line. So our case is fairly complete. I'm sorry to have to inform you, Mr. Fenley, that not only did your half-brother kill your father, but he tried his level best to put the crime on your shoulders.

"He overreached himself in sending for Scotland Yard men. We have seen too much of the seamy side of life to accept as Gospel truth the first story we hear. The very fact that Hilton Fenley was attacking you in your absence prejudiced us against him at the outset. There were other matters, which I need not go into now, which converted our dislike into active suspicion.

"But it is only fair that you should understand how narrow was your escape from arrest. Had the local police been in sole charge I am bound to say you would have passed this night in a cell. Luckily for you, Mr. Furneaux and I set our faces against the notion of your guilt from the beginning. Long before we saw you, we were keeping an eye on the real criminal. When you did appear, your conduct only confirmed our belief in your innocence."

"I told you why, you will remember," piped Furneaux.

But Robert Fenley said no word. He was stunned. He began to feel ill again, and made for his room. Sylvia had not been seen since she heard of Mrs. Fenley's death. The detectives collected their belongings, which with the gun and a bag packed with various articles taken from Hilton Fenley's suite—the reel, for instance, a suit of clothes bearing marks, possibly of moss, and the leather portfolio of papers—were entrusted to Farrow and another constable for safe conveyance. Accompanied by Trenholme, they walked to Easton. On the way the artist supplied sufficient details of his two meetings with Sylvia to put

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them in possession of the main incidents. Furneaux, though suffering from a splitting headache, had recovered the use of a vinegary tongue.

"I WAS mistaken in you," he chuckled. "You're a rank impressionist. Indeed, you're a neo-impressionist, a get-busy-and-do-it-now master of art. . . . But she's a mighty nice girl, isn't she?"

"Meaning Miss Manning?" said Trenholme coldly.

"No. Eliza."

"Sorry. I misunderstood."

"*'Cré nom!* You've got it bad."

"Got what bad?"

"The matrimonial measles. You're sickening for them now. One of the worst symptoms in the man is his curt refusal to permit anybody else to admire one bright particular star of womanhood. If the girl hears another girl gushing over the young man, she's ready to scratch her eyes out. By Jove! It'll be many a day before you forget your visit to Roxton Park this morning, or yesterday morning, or whenever it was.

"I'm mixed. Life has been very strenuous during the past fifteen hours. If you love me, James, put my poor head under a pump, or I'll be dreaming that our lightning sketch performer here, long John Trenholme, late candidate for the P. R. A., but now devoted to the cult of Hymen, is going to marry Eliza, of the White Horse, and that the fair Sylvia is pledged to cook us a dinner tomorrow night—or is it tonight? Oh, Gemini, how my head aches!"

"Don't mind a word he's saying, Mr. Trenholme," put in Winter. "Hilton Fenley hit him a smack with that rifle, and it developed certain cracks already well marked. But he's a marvelously 'cute little codger when you make due allowance for his peculiar ways, and he has a queer trick of guessing at future events with an accuracy which has surprised me more times than I can keep track of."

Trenholme was too good a fellow not to put up with a little mild chaff of that sort. He looked at the horizon, where the faint streaks of another dawn were beginning to show in the northeast.

"Please God," he said piously, "if I'm deemed worthy of such a boon, I'll marry Sylvia Manning, or no other woman. And, when the chance offers, Eliza of the White Horse shall cook you a dinner to make your mouth water. Thus will Mr. Furneaux's dream come true, because dreams go by contraries!"

CHAPTER XVII

THE SETTLEMENT

WINTER tried to persuade his mercurial-spirited friend to snatch a few hours' rest. The Police Inspector obligingly offered a bed; but short of a positive order, which the Superintendent did not care to give, nothing would induce Furneaux to let go his grip on the Fenley case.

"Wait till the doctor's car comes back," he urged. "The chauffeur will carry the story a few pages farther. At any rate, we shall know where he dropped Fenley, and that is something."

Winter produced a big cigar, and Trenholme felt in his pockets for pipe and tobacco.

"No, you don't, young man," said the big man firmly. "You're going straight to your room in the White Horse. And I'll tell you why. From what I have heard about the Fenleys, they were a lonely crowd. Their friends were business associates and they seem to own no relatives; while Miss Manning, if ever she possessed any, has been carefully shut away from them. Now the position of affairs in The Towers will be strained tomorrow. The elder Fenleys are dead; one son may be in jail—or, if he isn't, might as well be—and the other, as soon as he feels his feet, will be giving himself airs. Now, haven't you a mother or an aunt who would come to Roxton and meet Miss Manning, and perhaps help her to get away from a house which is no fit place for her to live in at present?"

"My mother can be here within an hour of the opening of the telegraph office," said Trenholme.

"Write the telegram now, and the constable on night duty will attend to it. When your mother arrives, tell her the whole story, and send her to Miss Manning. Don't go yourself. You might meet Robert Fenley, and he would certainly be cantankerous. If your mother resembles you, she will have no difficulty in arranging matters with the young lady."

"If I resemble my mother, I am a very

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fortunate man," said the artist simply.

"I thought it would be that way," was the smiling comment. "One other thing: I don't suppose for a minute that Miss Manning is acquainted with a reputable firm of solicitors. If she is, tell her to consult them, and get them to communicate with Scotland Yard, where I shall supply or leave with others certain information which should be acted on promptly in her behalf. If, as I expect, she knows no lawyer, see that she takes this card to the address on it and give Messrs. Gibb, Morris & Gibb my message. You understand?"

"Yes."

"Finally, she must be warned to say nothing of this to Robert Fenley. In fact, the less that young spark knows about her affairs the better. After tonight's adventure that hint is hardly needed, perhaps; but it is always well to be explicit. Now off with you."

"I'm not tired. Can I be of any service?"

"Yes. I want you to be ready for a long day's work in Miss Manning's interests. Mr. Furneaux and I may be busy elsewhere. Unquestionably we shall not be in Roxton; we may even be far from London. Miss Manning will want a friend. See to it that you start the day refreshed by some hours of sleep."

"Good-by," said Trenholme promptly. "Sorry you two will miss Eliza's dinner. But that is only a feast deferred. By the way, if I leave Roxton I'll send you my address."

"Don't worry about that," smiled the Superintendent. "Our friend the Inspector here will keep tab on you. Before you're finished with inquests, police courts and assizes you'll wish you'd never heard the name of Fenley. . . . By Jove, I nearly forgot to caution you. Not a word to the press. . . . Phi-ew!" he whistled. "If they get on to this story in its entirety, won't they publish chapter and verse!"

SO TRENHOLME went out into the village street and walked to his quarters in the White Horse Inn. It was not yet two o'clock, but dawn had already silvered the northeast arc of the horizon. Just twenty hours earlier an alarm clock had waked him into such a day as few have experienced. Many a man has been brought unexpectedly into intimate touch with a tragedy of no personal concern, but seldom indeed do the Fates contrive that death and love and high adventure should be so closely bound, and packed pellmell into one long day.

Only to think of it! When he stole upstairs with the clock to play a trick on Eliza, he had never seen Sylvia nor so much as heard her name spoken. When he sang of love and the dawn while striding homeward through the park, he had seen her, yet did not know her, and had no hope of ever seeing her again. When he worked at her picture, he had labored at the idealization of a dream which bade fair to remain a dream. And now, by some magic jugglery of ordinary events, each well within the bounds of credibility, yet so overwhelmingly incredible in their sequence and completeness, he was Sylvia's lover, her defender, her trusted knight errant.

Even the concluding words of that big, round-headed, sensible detective had brought a fantasy nearer attainment. If Sylvia were rich, why then a youngster who painted pictures for a living would hardly dare think of marrying her. But if Sylvia were poor—and Winter's comments seemed to show that these financiers had been financing themselves at her expense—what earthly reason was there that she should not become Mrs. John Trenholme at the earliest practicable date? None that he could conceive. Why, a fellow would have to be a fool indeed who did not know when he had met the one woman in the world! He had often laughed at other fellows who spoke in that way about the chosen one. Now he understood that they had been wise and he foolish.

But suppose Sylvia——oh, dash it, no need to spoil one's brief rest by allowing a beastly doubt like that to rear its ugly head! One thing he was sure of—Robert Fenley could never be a rival; and Fenley, churl that he was, had known her for years, and could hardly be pestering her with his attentions if she were pledged to another man. Moreover he, John, newly in love and tingling with the thrill of it, fancied that Sylvia would not have clung to him with such complete confidence when the uproar arose in the park if—— Well, well—the history of the Fenley case will never be brought to an end if any attempt is made to analyze the effect of love's first vigorous growth in the artistic temperament.

About a quarter past three Dr. Stern's

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little landaulet was halted at the same crossroad where a policeman had stopped it nearly three hours earlier.

"That you, Tom?" said the constable. "You're wanted at the station."

"What station?" inquired the chauffeur.

"The police station."

"Am I, by gum? What's up?"

"The Scotland Yard men want you."

"But what for? I haven't run over so much as a hen."

"Oh, it's all right. You're wanted as a witness. Never mind why. *They'll* tell you. The doctor is there, smoking a cigar till you turn up."

"I left him at Joe Bland's."

"Joe Bland has left Roxton for Kingdom Come. And The Towers is half burnt down. Things haven't been happening while you were away, have they?"

"Not half," said Tom.

"No, nor quarter," grinned the policeman to himself when the car moved on. "Wait till you know who you took on that trip, and why, and *your* sparkin'-plug'll be out of order for a week."

It was as well that the chauffeur had not the slightest notion that he had conveyed a murderer to London when he began to tell his tale to his employer and the detectives. They wanted a plain, unvarnished story, and got it. On leaving the offices in Bishopsgate Street, Fenley asked to be driven to Gloucester Mansions, Shaftesbury Avenue. Tom had seen the last of him standing on the pavement, with a suitcase on the ground at his feet. He was wearing an overcoat and a derby hat, and was pressing an electric bell.

"He tol' me I needn't wait, so I made for the Edgeware Road; an' that's all," said Tom.

"Cool as a fish!" commented Furneaux.

"Well, sir, I didn't get hot over it," said the surprised chauffeur.

"I'm not talking about you. Could you manage another run to town? Are you too tired?"

The mystified Tom looked at his employer. Dr. Stern laughed.

"Go right ahead!" he cried. "I'm thinking of buying a new car. A hundred and twenty miles in one night should settle the matter so far as this old rattletrap is concerned."

"Of course we'll pay you, doctor," said Winter.

"That's more than Hilton Fenley will ever do, I'm afraid."

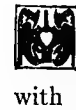
Tom tickled his scalp under his cap.

"Mr. Hilton gemme a fiver," he said rather sheepishly. There was something going on that he did not understand, but he thought it advisable to own up with regard to that lordly tip.

"You're a lucky fellow," said the doctor. "What about petrol? And do you feel able to take these gentlemen to London?"

Tom was a wiry person. In five minutes he was on the road again, bound for Scotland Yard this time. As a matter of form a detective was sent to Gloucester Mansions, and came back with the not unforeseen news that Mrs. Garth was very angry at being disturbed at such an unearthly hour. No; she had seen nothing of Mr. Hilton Fenley since the preceding afternoon. Some one had rung the bell about two o'clock that morning, but the summons was not repeated; and she had not inquired into it, thinking that a mistake had been made and discovered by the blunderer.

Sheldon was brought from his residence. He had a very complete report concerning Mrs. Lisle; but that lady's shadowy form need not flit across the screen, since Robert Fenley's intrigues cease to be of interest. He had despatched her to France, urging that he must be given a free hand until the upset caused by his father's death was put straight. Suffice it to say that when he secured some few hundreds a year out of the residue of the estate, he married Mrs. Lisle, and possibly became a henpecked husband. The Garths, too, mother and daughter, may be dropped. There was no getting any restitution by them of any share of the proceeds of the robbery. They vowed they were innocent agents and received no share of the plunder. Miss Eileen Garth has taken up musical comedy, if not seriously at least zealously, and commenced in the chorus with quite a decent show of diamonds.



LONDON was scoured next morning for traces of Hilton Fenley, but with no result. This again fell in with anticipation. The brain that could plan the brutal murder of a father was not likely to fail when contriving its own safety. Somehow both Winter and Furneaux were convinced that Fenley would make for Paris, and that once there it would be

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difficult to lay hands on him. Furneaux, be it remembered, had gone very thoroughly into the bond robbery, and had reached certain conclusions when Mortimer Fenley stopped the inquiry.

In pursuance of this notion they resolved to watch the likeliest ports. Furneaux took Dover, Winter Newhaven and Sheldon Folkestone. They did not even trouble to search the outgoing trains at the London termini, though a detailed description of the fugitive was circulated in the ordinary way. Each man traveled by the earliest train to his destination and, having secured the aid of the local police, mounted guard over the gangways.

Furneaux drew the prize, which was only a just compensation for a sore head and sorer feelings. He had changed his clothing, but adopted no other disguise than a traveling-cap pulled well down over his eyes. He took it for granted that Fenley, like every other intelligent person going abroad, was aware that all persons leaving the country are subjected to close if unobtrusive scrutiny as they step from pier to ship. Fenley, therefore, would have a sharp eye for the quietly dressed men who stand close to the steamer officials at the head of the gangway, but would hardly expect to find Nemesis hidden in the purser's cabin. Through a porthole Furneaux saw every face and, on the third essay, while the fashionable crowd which elects to pay higher rates for the eleven o'clock express from Victoria was struggling like less exalted people to be on board quickly, he found his man in the thick of the press.

Fenley had procured a new suit, a Homburg hat, and some baggage. In fact, it was learned afterwards that he hired a taxi at Charing Cross, breakfasted at Canterbury, and made his purchases there at leisure, before driving on to Dover.

He passed between two uniformed policemen with the utmost self-possession, even pausing there momentarily to give some instruction to a porter about the disposition of his portmanteaux. That was a piece of pure bravado, perhaps a final test of his own highly strung nerves. The men, of course, were not watching him or any other individual in the hurrying throng. They had a sharp eye for Furneaux, however, and when he nodded and hurried from his lair one of them grabbed Fenley by the shoulder.

At that instant a burly German, careless of any one's comfort but his own, and somewhat irritated by Fenley's halt at the mouth of the gangway, brushed forward. His weight, and Fenley's quick flinching from that ominous clutch, loosed the policeman's hold, and the murderer was free once more for a few fleeting seconds.

The constable pressed on, shoving the other man against the rail.

"Here. I want you," he said, and the quietly spoken words rang in Fenley's ears as if they had been bellowed through a megaphone. Owing to his own delay, there was a clear space in front. He took that way of escape instinctively, though he knew he was doomed, since the ship's officers would seize him at the policeman's call.

Then he saw Furneaux, whose foot was already on the lower end of the gangway. That, then, was the end! He was done for now. All that was left of life was the ghastly progress of the law's ceremonial until he was brought to the scaffold and hanged amidst a whole nation's loathing. His eyes met Furneaux's in a glare of deadly malice. Then he looked into eternity with daring despair, and dived headlong over the railing into the sea.

That awesome plunge created tremendous excitement among the bystanders on quay and ship. It was seen by hundreds. Men shouted, women screamed, not a few fainted. A sailor on the lower deck ran with a life belt, but Fenley never rose. His body was carried out by the tide, and was cast ashore some days later at the foot of Shakespeare's Cliff. Then the poor mortal husk made some amends for the misdeeds of a warped soul. In the pockets were found a large amount of negotiable scrip, and no small sum in notes and gold, with the result that Messrs. Gibb, Morris & Gibb were enabled to recover the whole of Sylvia Manning's fortune, while the sale of the estate provided sufficiently for Robert Fenley's future.

THE course of true love never ran smoother than for John and Sylvia. They were so obviously made for each other, they had so determinedly flown to each other's arms, that it did not matter tuppence to either whether Sylvia were rich or poor. But it mattered a great deal when they came to make plans for a glorious future. What a big, grand world it

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was, to be sure! And how much there was to see in it! The Continent, America, the gorgeous East! They mapped out tours that would find them middle-aged before they neared England again. Does life consist then, in flitting from hotel to hotel, from train to steamship? Not it. Mr. and Mrs. John Trenholme will "settle down" like all other reasonable-minded people. Meanwhile, they are having a fine time of it—last heard of in a *dahabiyeh* on the Nile.

ONE evening in the Autumn, Winter and Furneaux took Sheldon over to Roxton and dined with Dr. Stern and Tomlinson at the White Horse. Tomlinson had bought the White Horse and secured Eliza with the fixtures. Of course, there was talk of the Fenleys, and Winter told how Hilton Fenley's mother had been unearthed in Paris. She was a spiteful and wizened half-caste; but she held her son dear, as mothers will, be they black or white or chocolate-colored, and it was to maintain her in an establishment of some style that he had begun to steal. She had married again, and the man had gone through all her money, dying when there was none left. She retained his name, however, and Fenley adopted it, too, during frequent visits to Paris. Hence he was known there by a good many people, and could have sunk his own personality had he made good his escape. The mother's hatred of Mortimer Fenley had probably communicated itself to her son. When she was told of Hilton's suicide and its cause, she said that if anything could console her for his death it was the fact that he had avenged her wrongs on his father.

"What was her grievance against poor Mortimer Fenley?" inquired the doctor. "I knew him well, and he was a decent sort of fellow—rather blustering and dictatorial but not bad-hearted."

"His success, I believe," said Winter. "They disagreed, and she divorced him, thinking he would remain poor. The whirligig of time changed their relative positions, and to a jealous-minded woman that was unforgivable."

"The affair made a rare stir here anyhow," went on the doctor. "The people who have taken The Towers have not only changed the name of the place, but they have commissioned a friend of mine, an architect, to alter the entrance. There will be two flights of steps and a covered porch, so the exact spot where Fenley fell dead will be built over."

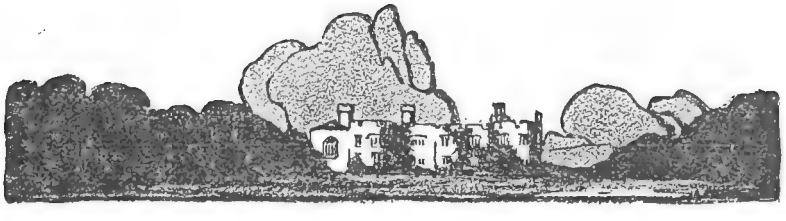
"Gentlemen," said Tomlinson, "talking is dry work. I haven't my old cellar to select from, but I can recommend the brands you see on the table. Mr. Furneaux, I'm sure you have not forgotten that Château Yquem?"

Then, and not until then, did the ex-butler hear that the detectives had never tasted his famous port. His benign features were wrung with pain, for it was a wine of rare "bowket," and hard to replace.

But Furneaux restored his wonted geniality by opening a parcel hitherto reposing on the sideboard.

"I never sent you that bottle of Alto Douro," he cried. "Here it is—a crusted quart for your own drinking. Lest you should be tempted to be too generous tonight, I've brought another. Now—a cradle and a corkscrew!"

So, after a dirge, the story ends on a lively note, for what is there to compare with good wine and good cheer, each in moderation? And one bottle among five is reasonable enough in all conscience.



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BY PRIMITIVE CODE

By Earl Ennis

FROM Bixler to Grit, on the edge of the desert, is sixty miles as the crow flies. The cattle trail between the two winds through the narrow sandstone jaws of Poncho Cut—a heartbreaking climb on one side and a rocky slide on the other—and the distance this way is nearer ninety miles—a full thirty hours in the saddle.

"Rant" McGill, outlaw and bad man, made it in one day with a price on his head and the blood of a man on his hands, and though there were many who saw him ride into Grit in the late of the evening on a sobbing horse and wondered as they looked, there were none who questioned; for the desert breeds a quick eye and a tardy tongue and the reputation of McGill was not one to inspire garrulity.

It was toward the middle of July that he came, when the heat of the year was most intense. Parched hillsides pointed their scorched yuccas skyward like supplicating hands and stretched dead and gray under the dazzling blaze of the midsummer sun. The white glaze of the alkali reflected the heat in pulsing waves that danced to the clacking tune of complaining roofs and mingled with the smell of dampened earthen ollas to form a setting distinctive of the Mohave Desert.

In Black Le Farge's, sheltered from the torrid outer air, the crowd was heavy, for the beer was cool, the games paying well, and the cowpunchers, just in from the Summer rodeo, were throwing their money recklessly and calling thirstily for drinks as they crowded around the bar. Deft-fingered gamblers cupped cautious handfuls of elusive cards and watched with inscrutable faces for the fifth ace that always meant the quick word or the quicker shot.

Around the roulette wheel, range riders and sheepmen grouped about the little ivory ball that romped from color to color in wanton perversity, and paid the price of its irresponsible whims without a murmur—and tried again. At the tables, men slapped each other on the backs in rough play and sang tuneless songs of interminable length to the rhythm of pounding glasses.

Stepped into this Rant McGill, dust-powdered and saddle-stiff, his great hands hanging loosely at his sides and his rapid glance taking in every face in the room. As his crouch-shouldered figure loomed long against the swinging doors, a dead silence fell on the place.

Cards remained poised in midair, drinks were left untouched and the little ivory ball lay forgotten in its pit, while man after man faced the little head and gimlet eyes

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of the outlaw, with tightening nerves. For a space he remained where he stood, his back against the door and the light gleaming on the cartridges in his belt; then, sensing a lack of hostility, he strode to the bar and called for whisky, his spurs rasping coldly on the bare floor.

As the bartender spun a fresh bottle unevenly before the newcomer and followed it with the usual chaser of lukewarm water the tension of the place relaxed somewhat and games recommenced, though uncertainly. Interrupted conversations resumed and the click of chips, the whirr of the wheel and here and there a scrap of song broke intrepidly through the tension. Nevertheless, through it all ran a note of apprehension, an unwonted preoccupation marking the temper of the place and indicating more plainly than words that the minds of all were centered on the sinister figure that lounged nonchalantly on the end of the bar and rolled a cigarette between careless fingers.

After a while McGill spoke and every man in the room heard the words.

"I'll be going on tonight," he said to the bartender; and then he added quietly, "I reckon there won't be any riding my way on the trail."

It was not what he said, for the words were simple enough. It was the way he said it—the deadly menace he put into the words without a change of inflection. Every man in the room understood and felt something contract at the pit of his stomach.

The bartender licked dry lips and spoke tentatively.

"You'll be needing a new mount," he ventured, with a glance under the half doors at McGill's horse, gasping in the street.

"I aim to get one," the outlaw replied indifferently, but with the same note in his voice.

Again they understood and understanding, sat motionless when, a few minutes later, McGill walked from the place and took his pick from the row of mustangs tethered at the rack. The man who owned the mustang sat supine like the rest, while the outlaw sprang to saddle, and without a glance to right or left, faded away toward the gathering gloom of the southern hills.

THERE are various reasons for the dominance of one man over another —reasons that are explainable by abstruse or physiologic reasoning; but in the great bulk of cases it is due to the preponderance of mental positiveness that renders the lesser determination impotent, like the charming power of a snake upon a bird. Such was the deadly effect of Rant McGill upon the men in Black Le Farge's, and although there were many there who were counted bad as bad men go, the unspeakable record of this outlaw—famed for his wanton killings—numbed their nerves and left them without the power of decisive motion, and they let him go his way without molestation.

And although later the games resumed in earnest and money shifted to and fro, the fun of the evening was dissipated and the laughter carried a strained note and men gambled listlessly and left early, speculating upon the business that drove Rant McGill through Grit, indifferent to carousal.

It was not until the morning of the next day, when the Sheriff racketed up the main street with placards under his arm, that they learned the facts of the matter; and they clustered close and listened silently to the tale of McGill's latest outrage, as the Sheriff hammered notices on the prominent stores with the butt of his Colt and talked through a mouthful of tacks.

When he had finished, a lean cowpuncher shouldered through the crowd, hitching his thumb in his gun belt as he came, and without a word held up his hand. A dozen others, noting the action, edged in behind, following his lead. The Sheriff said a few terse words, adding the customary formula for creating deputies, and thirteen hands went up and thirteen hands came down, invested by law with the authority to kill or capture Rant McGill on sight.

It was less than an hour later that the posse crossed the hills to the south, just as the early heat of the kindling sun was making itself felt, the men sitting loose in the saddle and conserving the energy of their horses for the long, hard trip ahead. Notwithstanding their seeming deliberation of movement, however, they traveled rapidly and by the time they pulled leather in the arid wastes of Death Cañon at noon, many miles had dropped from the cactus-strewn stretches of the Mohave.

An hour later, they halted in the grudging shade of a bunch of clustered mesquites, delaying only long enough to take a dip into welcome canteens and tighten the cinches of their thinning mounts by another hole, after which they pushed steadily on, reaching

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the edge of the borax sinks late in the afternoon with fagged bodies and jaded animals.

The next day was much the same—miles of interminable sage and sand and blistering eternities of heat, with the opposite alternate of chilling cold at night, and no sign of the fugitive. The nearest the posse ever came to McGill was toward the cool of the third day, when he was seen across the desolate width of a basin shunned like the plague—the deadly Movediza Valley where, it is said, every moving thing is sooner or later sucked down into the pockets of inexorable quicksands. How McGill made it, no one knew.

They shook their heads and looked at one another as the Sheriff pointed across to the top of the far ridge where, outlined in silhouette against the orange-tinted evening sky, the long crouching figure of a lone horseman plunged desperately up the untrailed incline of the foothills beyond and dropped over the crest; and in silence the posse doubled in its tracks and returned as it had come—empty-handed.

Back in Grit, resting their tired limbs on chair seats, the posse told of the chase and its futile ending, and the story brought recollections of others. Men hitched their chairs close while many tales passed of the deviltry of Rant McGill to which they listened with pipes gone out and thoughtful faces. Among them all the reputation of the outlaw was the same. He was rated as bad—clear through. He was a killer, they said, of the worst type; the type that, under whisky, kills wantonly for the sake of killing. Many a man had looked into his faded eyes, but never to his good, and he who crossed McGill was as good as dead.

DAYS trailed into weeks and the Sheriff's placards turned yellow, curled in the sun and dropped off. Men ceased to talk of the $2000 reward offered for the outlaw's capture, dead or alive, and like the discovery of gold it became a tale of the past. Then one day—some three months later—Rant McGill came again to Grit and this time he did not leave empty-handed. It was "Baldy" Quinn, who kept the only respectable gambling house in the town, who suffered from his depredation.

It was pay day on the range. On the croupier's side of the table the cowpunchers' money lay in shining heaps. McGill walked in about noon—with his thumb on the hammer of his Colt .45 and his hat pulled low on the bridge of his flattened nose. Reaching out the terrible hand that gave him the nickname of "Tarantula"—"Rant" for short—the hand with the covering of long red hair, he scooped the gold into a saddlebag which hung over his arm, and backed from the room. There were half a hundred men in the place at the time, none of them cowards and most of them true on the trigger; but something about the man—perhaps the shape of his head, or the way he walked, or the primitive curve of his back—stirred flickerings of fear that reached back to the youth of the race when men of his type, with long, dangling arms and huddled crouch, pursued wild things through dim-lighted forest tangles and killed them with their naked hands, inspiring terrors that were destined to last, dream-sustained, through all the ages of the world's history.

And they stood spinelessly inactive and allowed him to go unmolested. Afterward, freed from the oppression of his presence, they marveled at their own impotence.

The long restless days wore on and the year passed the crest of the Summer and turned down the slant of the autumnal solstice. In the air was a peculiar irritating quality that had a distinct feel, both ominous and malignant. Old-timers, sensing the nerve tension that heralds the approach of atmospheric electricity, sniffed suspiciously and peered off toward Santa Ana for the yellow haze of a coming sandstorm. Even the cattle in the fields grew restless and pawed the baked adobe and circled fretfully about their leaders.

No less did the poignant disquiet of the air affect Rant McGill. From Larsen to Bagdad the shifting trails were jotted with grim testimonials of his frenzied abandon. Sometimes it was a lone prospector who paid the tithe in sweat-won hoardings; sometimes a pack train bound for assay; and once the bank at Bixler felt his heavy hand and sacrificed its watchman to his baleful brigandage. The range, that had always been fear-free, took to sleeping with barred doors and rifles handy, while posse after posse followed the will-o'-the-wisp of his trail and had their trouble for their pains.

Desert towns are not given to hysteria and Grit was famous, even on the desert, for its dulness. But when Rant McGill

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killed the Sheriff on the last day of August —shot him in the back, coldly, implacably; shot him because he was what he was, an officer of the law against which McGill had set his hand, a fever of madness swept over the place.

The Sheriff was popular along the Mohave —gritty, generous and open-handed—the friend of cowpuncher, tin-horn, banker, and Greaser alike. He had been killed from behind without being given a chance, and the spirit of fair play which makes men fight face to face had been grossly outraged.

Excited knots gathered on the street corners and in saloons. Faces flamed and fists hit palms while the owners swore "By ——!" to get the slayer and stop the reign of terror. It would have gone hard with Rant McGill had he set foot in Grit that night, for justice was still rudimentary in that section and towns were wont to settle their problems according to the exigencies of the occasion, and the popular superstition was blinded by a vertigo of frenzy that cried aloud for the life of Rant McGill. But the personal equation can not long be excluded from any human movement and, moreover, crises are of the man and not the mob; hence, after the first few hours, the red mist of madness began to dispel; and, without a leader, the flame of their wrath sank to sullen coals of resentment, and the third night trailed at the heels of the second useless day, while impatient mustangs nosed the railposts before the Sheriff's empty office.

Through the swinging doors of Black Le Farge's place, angry rumbles of protest were clearly audible, but the close-knit groups no longer held together. Men passed each other with furtive glances and averted faces, for none cared to look too long into another's questioning eye while the star of Tarantula McGill's latest victim lay on the desk in the empty room.

THE fourth day brought a stranger to Grit from the North—a rangy, silent man with quiet manners and steady eyes that showed no fear in them. With him came Rickey, a shy, curly-headed boy, his own flesh and blood, with a disposition that wound the tendrils of Grit's affection around him in one week.

New to the place, the citizens regaled the newcomer with the doings of the outlaw. He listened gravely, saying nothing while they described Rant McGill—the small, faded eyes, mis-set and much too close; the flat forehead; the heavy jaw; the massive drooping shoulders with the primitive arms and the big hairy hands that could spin a Colt .45 faster than the eye. The stranger muttered beneath his breath as he listened, but his face was impassive and he made no comments.

Many were piqued by his impassive silence and would have liked to question him; but there was something about the man that forbade familiarity and they respected his reticence then as they did during the days that followed, when he came to be known among them as "Stranger"—a man of long silences, who tended his cattle on the hills to the east and sought the companionship of none.

The excitement accompanying the Sheriff's death abated somewhat and the routine of life dropped back into the seasoned ruts of monotony. Men went about their business as before, but with more thoughtful faces than had been their wont, and when they passed the window of the empty office where a star lay on the dingy table and grew tarnished in the desert's grime, they cursed softly to themselves and shut their fingers tightly against their palms.

Among them all went Rickey, making friends right and left with his gentle impulsiveness and shy advances. From him they learned of the woman who lay buried across the divide—the woman who had meant so much to the boy and his father, and the great hearts of them all went out to him. Many an awkward gift from gruff cowboy or gruffer miner found its way to the lad's responsive hands, and Rickey—such was his nature—loved them all and filled the longings of a dormant hunger in the hearts of these big, bluff men, for something to protect.

IT WAS toward the end of September that Grit next saw Rant McGill. The day was branded into their minds forever. The late-year drought was blasting the land and shriveling the sparse vegetation into blackened tufts. Over the southern horizon, the amber yellow haze of the long expected sandstorms settled down grittily on the flatness of things like drifting pollen. In the air was the depression that is usually associated with earthquakes and tornadoes and is one of the peculiarities of a drifting sand blow.

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Men gazed at the dazzling, jaundiced sky and prayed or cursed for rain, wandering restlessly about, sensible to the growing irritation of the atmosphere and the threatening hysteria of their nerves, which sharpened their voices and interspersed their talk with fretful arguing. In Black Le Farge's, swarms of buzzing flies crawled on the sticky tables or tumbled into the acrid beer with wearying monotony, while the players quarreled and bickered like peevish children and mopped their dripping foreheads.

Suddenly the half doors swung open with a bang and every man in the place looked up, in the same instant catching his breath with a presentiment of trouble. The great figure of a man bulked in the doorway and a revolver gleamed in his hand in all its naked blueness. It was Rant McGill—and Rant McGill was drunk. For a moment he swayed a trifle unsteadily on his feet, whipping his brain into focus.

Then he lurched to the bar where he caught a bottle from the terrified bartender and drank the raw liquor in huge deep gulps, spreading his feet wide to maintain his balance. They could see his whitened knuckles from which the blood had receded through the intensity of his grip and the forward hunch of his head which spelled trouble in emblazoned letters.

Presently he turned toward the onlookers, seeming to feel that their eyes were upon him, and his tone as he spoke was menacing.

"There ain't a man in this town that ain't a yellow coyote," he said.

His cruel, mis-set eyes swept every face in the room, and the hollow nose of the gleaming weapon swept from side to side in a steady hand.

Dead silence followed the announcement. Superstition can not analyze, else it would not be what it is. Rant McGill's power over the citizens of Grit should have, in that moment, been its own undoing. But to these men, the long acceptance of his sinister influence had become a mental habit, which the action of the whisky had only served to strengthen.

Every man in the room knew that he should shoot the outlaw where he stood with the sneer on his lips, and the deadly insult hurled brutally into their faces, but the baleful personality of the man held them even then, and they writhed beneath the merciless lash of his tongue and made no move.

Suddenly out of a corner where he had been playing mumblety-peg with a sheepman, darted Rickey—Rickey the shy. Manned with righteous, injured pride, he fronted Rant McGill, with legs thrown wide and glowing eyes. In his pale cheeks burned two bright spots.

"You lie," he said distinctly, his clear boyish treble cutting the silence of the room like a whip-crack. "My daddy ain't a yellow coyote and if he was here he'd make you take it back."

Rickey! The only unmastered will in the room was defying Rant McGill and had told him he lied!

There was a second—two—three—ten, of cataleptic stillness while McGill stared dully at the frail, taut frame in front of him. Then, as the boy's words penetrated his whisky-lashed brain, his head dropped between his great hulking shoulders in the terrifying crouch of the tarantula. He took a step forward, toward the undaunted boy, raising his great hairy hand in which gleamed his naked Colt.

There was a flash, a spurt of flame, the jar of an explosion; and little Rickey, with his unafraid eyes and his head thrown back defiantly, whirled clear of the table, spun twice around, and struck the floor on his back. It was wanton—cold-blooded—barbaric! A shooting without reason, purpose or excuse!

FORGETTING the danger, every man in the room sprang to his feet, jerking at his holster. But McGill was too quick. The shot had sobered him instantly, and with the clearing of his brain came the realization of his precarious position. His weapon spoke twice again in quick succession, each time wounding. The answering shots from the cowpunchers smashed the mirror over the bar and thudded in the wall behind him as they closed in.

Whirling, he jumped for the door, throwing tables and chairs behind him to form a *chevaux de frise*, and when the rushing crowd had disentangled itself, he was gone; sending a last, derisive, splintering bullet through the panel of the door.

In every chain of provocations there is a weak link—a point which marks the limit of endurance and beyond which no one can safely go. A coward, cornered, will fight at the right word; a dreamer, balked at the crest of his emotion, will become an

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irresponsible maniac; baited men of all ranks will turn into raging demons if the provocation be psychologic. It is one of the hidden laws of life made manifest only under stress.

As tender hands lifted Rickey from the floor, there was not a man in the room but knew that the cowing reign of Rant McGill had passed, and with this knowledge sprang determined action. Extra ammunition passed from hand to hand; canteens were hastily filled and food tossed into saddle-bags, while gruff commands and harsh voices told of the gripping emotion that swayed them all. Within twenty minutes, a hundred men swung to horse and plunged out of town, grim faced and implacable. There was no speech between them—only the silence that accompanies the performance of great things.

As they raced past the spraddled sheep sheds that marked the farthest edge of town and struck out into the open trail, they were called to a sliding halt by hoarse shouting behind them. Through the swirl of dust in their wake came a wild-riding figure of a man. He was hatless and as he rode he stood in his stirrups, his right hand flung high in command to halt. It was not until he had come near enough to speak that they recognized the drawn, gray face of the "Stranger." His cheeks were sunken and his eyes glittered like the eyes of a fanatic, and the tones of his voice when he spoke were as dead as the gray of his pallor.

"No, boys," he said, and they saw that the knuckles of his hands were white where he gripped the rifle that he carried. "This is my affair. I saved McGill's life once. Now it belongs to me and I'm going to take it back."

They were men of the West, accustomed to seeing life in the raw. Their codes and obligations were as simple and direct as their speech, and they understood. Choking down the fury of their own desires, they turned reluctantly back and let him go alone. And he rode out across the sand with the evening light gleaming on the rowels of his spurs, believing that all of Life and Love that Destiny had given him she had taken back again, and that but one great move remained to him by way of reparation.

A few there were who saw him go, that called up long forgotten memories. These remembered that, in the days gone by, "Denver Dave" had been a pal of Rant McGill, and they had roamed the ridges together; and not one whit less did the desert fear Denver Dave than it feared Rant McGill.

They recalled how a slip of a woman, born to the rugged forces of the alkali country, its great hearts and broad vices—level-eyed and straight as a die—had made a man of one of them, so that he quit his evil ways and strove for the nameless something in her eyes that means most to a man. To-night, the one she reclaimed—Denver Dave—rode across the desert, with the respect of the range behind him, and a sorrow, common to their own, in his heart—across the desert for the pal of an earlier day, and every one knew it would be a fight to the death.

ACROSS the divide, beneath the shadow of Big Eye Butte, and half buried in the slaty shale of its crumbling side, a picket stake marked the camp of Rant McGill.

Far up on the face of the butte and covered by the gravels of many landslides was his cache where, wrapped in an old blanket, he buried what he did not use. His food was simple, primitive—like the food of his ancestors before the Fire-Man taught them to spin a whirling stick in rotten punk and get the mysterious flame—meal cakes baked on flat stones in the mid-day's torridness, for he built no signal fires either by day or by night; cactus fruit rubbed in the "cleaner weed" to remove the spines, and strips of greasy bacon, partially jerked.

All about the slant were littered scores of empty bottles that lay mute witnesses of alternate periods of muddled soddenness and mad delirium; periods from which he emerged with primal instincts aflame, to swoop down and kill and prey upon the race with which he had no kinship. Here month after month he lived among the tarantulas and crawling things of the desert—an impassable quicksand on two sides of him, a sheer bluff above him, and his face toward the only approach through which could come pursuit or molestation.

When McGill left Grit after the attack upon Rickey, he struck out along the intricacies of the unmarked trail by which he always approached his camp, riding hard through the windings and turnings that led due east from Grit and then swinging abruptly at right angles some twenty-five miles from the town to another trail that

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wound to the floor of the valley, below Big Eye Butte. It was not long before he noticed that his horse was flagging, and realizing that his situation was desperate and that this time pursuit would not drop away as it had done before, he began to figure on the necessity for a better animal.

The outlaw knew the Summer and he knew the country. Better than that, he knew the water holes, and they were dry. As he had ridden down to Grit in the early morning he had seen in the distance the wild herds coming up from the south for a fling at the brackish water in the floor of Dead Man's Valley. It occurred to him that if he would cut across the divide and drop down the far side to a slot cut through the upper end of the valley he could pen a thirst-crazed herd in a blind cañon and pick a new mount.

Accordingly he swung aside from the path he was following, traveling rapidly along the upper edge of the ridge from which he could see the flatness of the country below him, spread out like a map, stippled with scrub sage and cactus.

As the rising moon stenciled the desert in grotesque shadows, he dropped over the crest, standing out for a moment against the sky, like a specter. Then, with his tired animal slipping and sliding in the crumbling slate, half sitting down in its weariness, he worked his way down into the heart of Dead Man's Valley, some forty miles from Grit, and was swallowed up in the pall of darkness that hung over its depths like the gloom in a sunken chamber.

Three hours later, lying on his face in the gravel, Rant McGill saw the first of the suffering herds come thundering down the cañon, with flattened ears and the whites of their eyes showing in the early dawn. He let them pass.

A few minutes later the second band came down, with the smell of water in their nostrils and their heads held high. He let these pass. A third and a fourth herd boomed by, their bodies lathering and their flanks working in rhythmic unison with the thud of their hoofs. Still McGill lay motionless in his hiding-place, waiting.

Finally, out of the parch of the south, came a fifth band, and at its head that for which the outlaw had been waiting—a black stallion, giant in build, with great muscles that rippled under his ebony skin like swinging pistons, and a tail that pennanted out behind. The stallion led his mares like a king, his unshod hoofs beating sharply upon the iron stone fragments with which the bed of the cañon was covered and his nose pointing toward the unseen water hole.

When the pound of their hoofs had died away like the echoes of distant thunder, McGill rose to his feet. His face distended in an evil smile as the atavic impulse of the chase stirred within him, imparting to his features a touch of the sinister, diabolically cruel. Unhobbling his mount he shuffled down the slant, uncoiling his lariat as he rode, until he reached the bottom, where he turned and followed the tracks of the racing herds toward the closed end of the cañon.

The fight took place in a natural amphitheater, hollowed in the sandstone, with a hundred or so huddled mares for an audience. It was a terrifying struggle, like the struggles that throbbed through the Eddas of Norse mythology; for a man with animal strength fought a horse with human cunning, and it was like a contest between dynamic forces of the earth.

Hunters occasionally see such fights in Canadian woods between a bull moose and a panther, or in the jungles between a lion and python—combats in which strangely matched pairs battle to the death for unknown reasons. But the struggle of a primitive man with a wild horse of the hills, because of the higher intelligence of each, surpasses all of these in desperate endeavor.

IT WAS appalling. It was epic. McGill caught the herd he sought at the upper end of the valley, near the water stamp. With the wind in his face he crawled through the heaps of broken sandstone that filled the valley like jagged teeth. He made no sound as he crept, for he possessed that characteristic peculiar to animals and people who live much in the open, of moving with a total absence of sound; but the stallion, gifted with the sixth sense of instinct, felt his approach and wheeled to face the unknown danger, with nostrils quivering and wide-open eyes.

Suddenly the crack of McGill's revolver bit into the silences of the cañon with startling effect. The terrified band spun to all points of the compass, snorting in terror, the leader, with his nose pointed high in air and his throat swelling with fright, holding every muscle tense for instant flight from

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the unseen danger. There came the sibilant hiss of the lasso as it sprang from the ground like a live thing and locked with throttling grip about the stallion's neck; and then the struggle with brute strength pitted against cleverness and the odds in favor of the horse.

Again and again the stallion tried to elude the clutch high up on his throat, that clung to him like flexible steel, and scream after scream of rage issued from his gritting teeth as he fought with all the strength of his wild suppleness against the throttling pressure of its grasp. Finding this futile at last, he took to rushing the outlaw and it was only the elusive agility of the man that saved him from the hoofs of the maddened animal.

Finally, wearied with the uselessness of it all, and all but strangled, the horse paused, sagging back on the rope, and the two stood facing each other like gladiators pausing for breath. Slowly, hand over hand, McGill began to work his way toward the panting animal, his spurs anchored in the sand of the valley and the muscles of his massive shoulders bulging through his shirt.

Suddenly with a lightning-quick movement he slacked the rope, and the great stallion reared back his forelegs, pawing the air in an effort to regain his balance. As he stood there for a second, perhaps two, McGill spun his wrist in a short half circle and up the slackened rope there traveled a running loop—the fatal half hitch.

Up it went to the wildly waving forefeet with masterly precision and settled about them like a welded band. On the instant, McGill jumped back and threw his bulk against the tautness of the rope, and the black stallion, with his feet pinned together and his sides flecked with angry foam, struck the ground with a jar that knocked him senseless.

When he recovered and staggered to his feet, it was with the legs of a man wrapped around his belly—legs that were equipped with biting steel that stung and goaded him to frantic madness, and from which there seemed to be no escape. He fought valiantly, this ebony giant, writhing high in air with great wrenching leaps, there to whirl and wind and twist in wonderful contortions, until he struck stiff-legged, with feet bunched beneath him, in a jarring impact that would have unseated a less practised rider than Rant McGill. The fight could have but one ending, for the horse never lived that could throw the outlaw. The latter sat with unmoved face and iron grip and slowly but thoroughly beat the stallion into submission.

That night, a saddle-worn horse joined the outpouring wild herds that crashed down the cañon to the freedom of the open plains beyond; while Rant McGill rode back to his camp in the shadow of Big Eye Butte on a black stallion worth a king's ransom.

UPON the upper crest of Big Eye Butte, Denver Dave lay on his face in the alkali, his rifle with its magazine crammed to the breech with steel-tipped bullets within easy reach, and his hat pulled low over his sunburned face. For two days he had lain there, sheltered from the bake of the sun by the jut of an overhanging boulder, watching with interminable patience for the return of Rant McGill.

Following closely upon the outlaw's trail after his departure from Grit, he soon became aware he was following the tracks of a tiring horse, yet one able to make a considerable number of miles under hard riding. Like McGill, Denver Dave knew the country, the Summer and the location of the water holes. With the simplicity of perfect logic he placed himself in McGill's place and reasoned as the outlaw would have done.

He arrived at the same conclusion. McGill would try for a new mount. With his plainsman's ability to add two and two together, he reasoned that he must be near McGill's camp. Wasting no time in speculation, he began to circle through the upper end of the cut, picking out hoof tracks here and there, studying old marks and fresher ones, measuring and comparing, often lying down on his face in the dust and studying minutely the indications of travel through the heavy, shifting alkali, finally rising to scan the sky and strike out at right angles in the direction of Big Eye Butte, at a long loping trot.

Several hours later he discovered the remnants of the outlaw's camp—the empty bottles, the scattered sun-baked cakes and the picket stake. Digging in a spot where the sand showed signs of disturbance, he had found a filled canteen—sure evidence of McGill's return—and he realized that his long ride was finished. He looked about him for a spot that would give him the strategic

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advantage and saw at once that the top of the Butte offered the best command of the valley beneath—a position which could be attacked only along the uneven top of the plateau.

It was near eleven o'clock of the next day, when down the valley a great buzzard wheeled into view, circled slowly overhead with prophetic deliberation, grew dim and died against the sky. With his eyes toward the diminishing bird to rest his gaze, the lone watcher on the top of the Butte caught the impression of something moving along the top of the crest, on the far side of the valley. Concentrating rapidly he studied the opposite side of the range minutely, finally making out a tiny spot which moved along the ridge at a pace incredibly fast for a horseman. As he watched, every muscle in his body grew tense and his breath came short and quick.

The spot traveled along the upper crest without variation in speed until it reached the opening in the upper end of the valley. Here it hesitated for an instant, and then plunged down the incline toward the floor of the valley, passing out of sight behind the alluvial contour of some Pliocene river.

An hour later the spot reappeared in the floor of the valley itself, still moving at undiminished pace, but nearer now and clearly distinguishable as a man mounted upon a great black horse which he handled with consummate skill. To the ears of the silent watcher above came the faint tattoo of the animal's feet on the sun-baked gravel.

In another half hour, the spot had become clearly distinct, bringing into sharp view the crouching, unmistakable figure of Rant McGill on a spirited stallion, that lathered white and sped along the dangerous trail at a pace that would have tired an ordinary horse on level ground. Denver Dave could see the rider clearly now, and gripping his rifle in tense fingers he hitched along on his elbows, nearer to the edge of the bluff for a closer view of the man for whom he had waited.

A few minutes later, Rant McGill, swinging up the unmarked trail that led through the slaty shale on the side of Big Eye Butte, halted for an instant at the foot of the climb and turned in his saddle, alert to possible pursuit. There came a whine and a sound like the impact of a fist against bare flesh, and his black stallion shrieked, went to its knees and crumpled down in a heap. McGill whipped his rifle from the saddle scabbard and jumped clear with phenomenal quickness, alighting flat on his back. As he did so, the "plop" of a rifle echoed against the face of the Butte and reverberated down the valley in grumbling diminuendo. McGill lay motionless where he had fallen, his fingers resting on his rifle, his eyes scanning the face of the cliff above him for the puff of smoke that would mark the position of his enemy, and every faculty tense and concentrated.

IT IS one of the strange paradoxes of life that the more carefully the foundations of a man's planning are made, the less stable they seem when they are finished. He must accept the intervention of fate or chance in collateral occurences which, more often than not, reverse or nullify his schemes. Denver Dave, safely hidden in the niche at the top of the bluff, unseen against the brilliancy of the sky, with the man he sought in plain sight before him, had all the odds in his favor.

But a trivial and unforseen thing happened. His horse, which was munching unconcernedly at the sparse growths on the plateau top, came too close to the edge and stepped upon a treacherous, undercut ledge. The ledge crumbled, broke and shattered out into space, with the helpless, hobbled animal cutting futile, geometric figures in air and turning end over end to the floor of the valley beneath.

The sudden crash, the frightened scream of the animal and the roar of avalanching gravel brought Denver Dave to his feet, forgetful of the outlaw lying below. For an instant he stood outlined against the sky in plain view, and in that instant McGill had his chance, and the whole situation became reversed upon itself.

Coiling over his Winchester with the speed of a rattler, the outlaw whipped the muzzle of his weapon up the bluff and fired. The bullet struck the glistening stock of Denver Dave's rifle, jarring his arm numb and throwing him flat by its velocity. In a second he was up and had recovered his rifle, which lay some two feet away where the impact had thrown it, and was peering cautiously over the edge of the bluff, seeking for a final bead on Rant McGill.

The valley was empty. Two horses lay where they had fallen—one shot through the head, the other with a broken neck

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nd its feet in hobbles. That was all. Rant IcGill, in some mysterious way, had ropped from sight. Dave gazed toward he upper end of the cut. Nothing met is sight but the buzzard circling overhead.

For a long time he lay thus and studied he depths with intent eyes. Everywhere here was heat. It danced upward in little oncentric rings that fanned his face like he heat from a furnace. The valley seemed is hot as the plateau top. The sun burned nto his skull through the thickness of his iat and made his brain ache. He tore a iandful of wool from his chaps and, soaking t in the canteen, stuck it inside his hat, but his gave him little relief. There seemed to be no insulation from the agony. The hot metal of his Winchester blistered the palms of his hands as he shifted his elbows on the burning clay.

An hour passed and still he lay tense and motionless, his ears strained to catch the slightest sound and his feverish eyes studying every inch of the pit beneath. The air was becoming more oppressive and the yellow haze thicker. There was not a whisper of a breeze stirring, yet the air was full of sand carried in suspension, and it seemed to drift everywhere. It got into his eyes and shot them with blood; it got into his nostrils and throat and choked him; it got into his lungs and made them rasp. And still the heat beat down, mercilessly and pitilessly.

After a while the persistence of it commenced to tell upon him and objects blurred as he looked at them. Dizzy circles floated to and fro, wheeling and countermarching in strange designs. He realized for the first time that he was hungry and then he remembered that his kit was under the dead horse down in the valley. He felt thirsty too.

He unscrewed the cap of his canteen and peered in. The water was getting low. He must save it. He screwed the cover back and put the canteen in the shade. Then it occurred to him that there might be no water after all. In a panic he tore at the top again and looked in. The water was there. He sank back from the reaction, weak and trembling.

Still no sign of McGill. A great shadow sped across the rocks at tremendous speed. He shaded his eyes from the brilliancy of the sun and looked up. It was a buzzard. It had seen the two dead horses and was closing in. The sight irritated him and he shifted his gaze the other way. Gravel and crumbling slate wherever he looked.

Suddenly an impulse came to him and on the instant he acted. Farther along the edge on which he was lying the drop to the valley beneath was not so abrupt. It slanted away in a mass of crumbling gravel at an angle that allowed a man to go down but not come up. Near the edge were several chunks of sun-baked adobe, as big as a doghouse and hardened through months of standing. Getting stiffly to his feet, he tugged at one of them.

It was heavier than he expected and he failed to move it. He tugged again and it gave slightly, but settled back to its depression again. He realized that he was weak from the heat and the realization urged him to greater endeavor. He renewed his efforts and the chunk came loose. He worked it to the top of the incline and pushed it over the edge.

He could hear it rolling and crashing into the depths beneath, as he waited with his his rifle on his knee for McGill to show. But the noise ceased and the whisper of the running gravel ceased and there was still no sign of life.

He sat for a long time in thought, moodily studying the various possibilities of the matter. The plateau top was becoming unbearable. He must go somewhere or the heat would drive him mad, and the best place appeared to be the floor of the valley. There he would have an equal chance with McGill.

He had not intended to give McGill an equal chance. McGill gave no chance to Rickey, and he had intended to kill the outlaw the same way. But somehow things had changed and that was the best he could do. The valley was still quiet. He decided to try the ruse once again.

He tore at another chunk of adobe and hurled it over the edge, and another and another until they went cascading to the bottom like a roaring avalanche. Great clouds of alkali and slate dust arose which obscured the incline and added to the stifle in the air. Suddenly a blind, unreasoning rage swept over him; rage that made him insensible to strategy.

He seized his rifle and swung himself clear of the edge, dropping some ten feet before he struck the shifting drift, then turning, tumbling, staggering to the bottom, where

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he lay on his face and gasped for breath, the dust grating into his lungs with every inhalation. Still no sign of McGill.

FOR a long time he lay as he had fallen. Then he picked himself up and slid his rifle under his arm, running his thumb along the cartridges in his belt. They were intact. He began to reconnoiter cautiously. His head had cleared somewhat by the rapid descent and the instincts of the chase were uppermost now.

He was some hundred feet from the two horses, which lay between him and the wall of the Butte. He raised his head and his hat was jerked from it. The squeal of the bullet and the crash of the detonation came almost simultaneously. He thrilled to his soul. Action at last! McGill had shown.

The fight lasted all that day. Not a shot but was carefully gaged. From beneath a secluded cavity formed by the rubbing noses of two giant boulders, McGill sent his steel-jacketed messengers with deliberate aim and terrible accuracy toward the rock behind which Denver Dave had taken his station—and Denver Dave answered in kind. The bullets chipped the iron stone and ricocheted from spot to spot with queer whistling sounds.

The stones themselves were blistering to the touch. Thirst became an element in the struggle and the tongues of the combatants began to swell. McGill's canteen lay pinned beneath his dead horse, while that of Denver Dave was on the bluff above—and neither was available.

Finally McGill grew tired of the monotony of it all. He craved action. He knew now that he was not being sought by an ordinary cowpuncher or a deputy sheriff but by a man inured to the long tedium and patient persistence of desert fighting. Changing his tactics, he began to worm along the floor of the valley, lying flat on his stomach, and stopping occasionally to drill a bullet into the gravel at the base of the pitted rock behind which his hidden antagonist lay crouched.

The echoes of the cañon took up the shots with its reverberations, obliterating an accurate sense of direction and aiding the outlaw in his plan. Denver Dave, unconscious of his approaching danger, lay flat on his face and with the consummate skill of an expert billiard player drove his bullets against the curved face of the rock where he believed McGill to be still hidden, trying to carom one of them into the secluded pocket beneath. It was a clever plan but McGill had a better one.

Slightly behind the rock which formed Denver Dave's shelter, the floor of the valley dropped away into a slight depression. To the left and closer to the base of the butte was a little pocket which some prehistoric river had worn into the surface. Carefully but surely McGill worked his way toward this natural pit, crawling on his stomach like a horned toad and moving with infinite patience to the point of unbalanced advantage.

It took McGill nearly half an hour to maneuver into position; but when he had done so he held the winning hand. He could see the recumbent figure of Denver Dave peering over his boulder toward the face of the Butte, unconscious of the change in their positions. A hump in the bed of the valley hid his shoulders, but the top of his head was clearly visible and upon this McGill drew a bead. But for the second time that day, the God of Good Luck watched over the destiny of Denver Dave.

Even as McGill's finger crooked about the trigger of his rifle, his victim choked with the parch of the desert's grime and ducked his head, and the bullet, missing its fatal mark, grazed the top of his skull. The impact turned Denver Dave completely over and spun his rifle from his hand and Rant McGill, satisfied that his leaden message had carried true, carelessly arose and stretched his aching muscles. He was curious now to see the face of his victim who had dared so valiantly to meet him on his own ground.

As he started across the intervening space, he staggered a little and a swift nausea swept over him. The heat had all but done its work and he realized that if the fight had gone much longer the issue would have been doubtful. He thanked his stars that he had had plenty of ammunition. He ran his thumb over his belt. There were just two cartridges left.

Rant McGill bent over the body of the man he had shot. The latter lay on his face, his muscles relaxed. All about him the ground was covered with empty shells and near him lay his hat, drilled cleanly through the crown. As McGill bent over him he saw the shoulders rise and fall slowly

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and for the first time realized that the man was not dead. He grabbed the prone man by the shoulder and turned him over on his back.

The face stared up at the dazzling sky with something familiar in the lines beneath the stubble that aroused strange, familiar memories; memories that dealt somehow with other desert fights, when he fought side by side with the one man that had ever held his respect. His rifle clattered to the ground. He stared at the wounded man with fascination—at the square jaw, the well set head and the flat ears.

His hand suddenly shot out and turned the wounded man's head to one side. He found what he expected—a hole drilled through the lobe of the ear; a hole he had gotten the night he saved McGill's life in Tucson. He was right! There before him was his old pal—Denver Dave!

With a bound he reached his fallen horse and jerked the canteen from beneath the saddle. Unscrewing the cover he dashed water into Denver Dave's face, prodigal with his supply, pouring it down Dave's neck and forcing some between his old pals lips in clumsy awkwardness.

Finally Denver Dave stirred, and with the taste of water in his mouth, strove for consciousness. In another minute he sat up unsteadily and looked into the queer, misset eyes of Tarantula McGill.

What they said there beneath the blaze of the late year sun, in that vast, empty valley no one will ever know. The elliptical turn of events had brought strange things to pass and neither man was blessed with the opium of forgetfulness that enabled him to blot the past from his memory.

To McGill there was the recollection of the days when he and the man before him, eating from the same mess kits, had fought the dangers common to both, shoulder to shoulder. They had parted friends, long before the raids of the outlaw had grown to wanton ravages, conceived in the fire of alcohol and fulfilled in mad delirium, and the one spot of decency that remained in McGill's soul was his gratitude to the man who had saved his life.

In Denver Dave's mind, other things were branded—things that went deeper than the recollection of a desert pal-ship —things that were tangled with a shy, curly-haired boy who lay back somewhere across the sand, with McGill's bullet through his tender body. Before him stood the being who had struck down the lad and the rudimental code of his life demanded retribution.

THEN he spoke and McGill's unasked questions were answered. As he talked, the heat-driven hysteria mounted in his arteries and beat at his temples, and a red mist danced before him with rings that wavered unsteadily; and between it all he could see the close-set eyes of Rant McGill staring in puzzled wonder.

As from a great distance he seemed to hear McGill saying something about a truce and offering to go back and surrender and pay the penalty of his crime in payment of some debt long forgotten; but the humming in his ears grew to a roaring and he could hear hundreds of wild herds pounding on hollow ground, and coming closer and closer, until he knew that it was the beat of his own heart and that the sound was in his head.

He struggled to control himself, but the deadly burn of the sun had gone too deep into his injured skull, and the brain itself was paying the penalty. Then he caught sight of McGill's hand—the hand with the covering of long red hair; something suggested in his ear that it was the hand that had killed Rickey. His brain fastened upon this idea and it grew into an obsession, until it expanded to the uttermost parts of his crippled intelligence. It was the law of the code talking to him; the atavic impulse that was an heritage from primal days. "An eye for an eye," it said, "a hand for a hand, a life for a life."

Somewhere in the jumble of his brain the ideas became twisted; somewhere around the roots of his understanding, the suggestions became entangled, and the two crossing in the hysteria of his emotion, evolved an incongruous mania that dinned into his ears with the thunder of the wild herds. The thought was fantastic—weird; but somehow, it seemed all right.

"A hand for a life," was the way it ran —"a hand for a life." He tried to reason. The life was Rickey's. But the hand? He could not think. He looked down. The hand was in front of him—a hand covered with long red hair.

That was it! He had it now! A hand for a life! A hand for a life! His brain was working better now. He must kill the hand

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that had killed Rickey. His face began to work convulsively, and with eyes that glistened with the terrible green light of an animal at bay, he glared alternately from McGill's hand to his face.

Suddenly Denver Dave sprang, with the fury of a demon in his face, and his arms outstretched like taloned cranes. Taken by surprise, McGill staggered back in an effort to save himself and reached for his Colt .45.

Quick as he was, the other was quicker, and the gun was wrenched from McGill's hand with a strength greater than his own, and weaponless, the two fought, hand to hand, chest to chest, panting, grunting, striking—each striving for the belt knife of the other, each intent upon the kill.

As the desert shadows came creeping across the sand with the purple twilight and the valley dropped into the blackness of night, the sound of the struggle could be heard, the sound of the blows coming fainter and mingling with the tramp of feet and the grunts of exhaustion.

BACK in Grit, the shooting of Rickey had stunned the town and all business suspended. The tragic occurrence was in every man's mouth and its outcome in every man's heart. The fear of Rant McGill was gone and all spoke freely of their feelings. The return of the posse with the information that Denver Dave had gone out across the sand alone, on the trail of the outlaw, brought more food for talk. Glimpses of the stranger's history came to light, and men speculated upon the relationship of these two men—Tarantula McGill and the father of Rickey—in the days when they had traveled the range together. Grave faces peered in through the door to the back room of Black Le Farge's, where "Diamond" Kate bent unceasingly over a little flushed face, and with a strange unaccustomed motherhood guarded the flickering spark of life in the frail body of the boy they all loved. The doctor had said he would do his best, but he held out no hope—there was nothing but to wait. The love of these gruff men for the boy had gone deep and their grief sounded the same depths, and they shook troubled heads and drank heavily and said little, as they dwelt upon the outcome of the struggle upon the desert.

The third day after that, a tanned cowpuncher voiced the general sentiment in Black Le Farge's.

"There ain't no man goin' to git McGill alone," he said. "It's goin' to take the whole —— town to bring him in. And at that—I dunno! I figure as how Stranger got his like the rest."

Then Black Le Farge spoke. Known from Chilkoot to Colon on the Isthmus, a man of many lives and the hardest in his business, he too had been won by Rickey.

"A favor's a favor," he pronounced heavily, "but cussed if a promise'll keep me from follerin' Stranger if you coyotes cain't knock a posse together."

The idea caught. Horses were waiting and the cool of the evening approaching—the best time for travel. In less time than in takes in the telling, most of Grit was riding forth into the desert.

IT WAS near noon on the morning of the sixth day following Denver Dave's departure that the tired, bedraggled posse reined in their mounts in response to a signal from a cowpuncher who rode well in front. Following his outstretched hand they looked toward the entrance to Movediza Valley, where they saw an object moving.

Riding closer for a nearer inspection they found a thing—scarce a man—and barely living. The fever of desert madness was in his eyes and his features were blurred by the cactus into which he had fallen. He staggered blindly across the burning sand, stumbling, falling and clutching at space—his raw feet leaving red blotches on the sand.

As the posse reached him he seemed to sense the approach of something near and sank down on his knees with a little inarticulate moan. They caught him up and forced water between his blackened lips—a drop at a time—and later, when he could drink it, a little whisky.

Gradually the tension of his muscles relaxed and into his eyes there came a glimmer of recognition—like that in the eyes of a man who awakes from a long dream. Familiar voices seemed to penetrate his consciousness and slowly he looked at his own ragged garments and then at the men before him.

It was Black Le Farge who saw the unasked question in his eyes—Black Le Farge, known from Chilkoot to Colon on the

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Isthmus as the hardest in his line—and answered it.

"It's all right," he said gently. "The kid'll pull through all to the good."

Then it was they knew that the tattered Thing was Denver Dave.

And while they waved their hats and cheered, he smiled for the first time since he had come among them as "Stranger"—and fainted dead away. As he fell, there dropped from his clothes an object, that struck the sand at their feet and lay staring up at them in hideous muteness. It was a great human hand, severed at the wrist and covered with long, red hair.

For a space no one moved, for there flashed in the brain of each a picture of the terrific hand-to-hand struggle that had taken place between two men, fighting with their primal passions aflame, somewhere out across the sands where the turquoise twilight was so soon to melt into the black velvet of the night, and into the minds of them all came the same thought—the primitive code had prevailed.

And then it was that Black Le Farge did a thing which was essentially of the Spirit of the West. Out of his pocket he took a tarnished, discolored star, and kneeling by the prone man pinned it on his tattered shirt.

"I reckon we'd better be gettin' the Sheriff back to civilization," was all he said, but every man in the posse straightened up and breathed hard, and was glad that it happened just that way.

HIT BY PITCHED BALL

By Hugh J. Fullerton

THE train was purring along eastward down the Valley of the Mohawk toward New York, where the team was to play the next day. I coiled up in the seat, rested my head against the cushions and gazed out of the window of the smoking-compartment of the sleeping-car.

The river widened and narrowed, spread itself in quiet pools or rushed bawling over the rock-strewn narrows. For half a mile beyond the water the lush grass of the river meadow lay green and bright, although it was September and the baseball season was hurrying to its close.

Rolling upward from the meadow's edge rose the spurs of the mountains, the hillsides checkerboarded with fences, with king rows of neat farmhouses above and below. White-and-black cows, polka-dotted against the green, added just the lights needed to make the landscape perfect, besides furnishing the milk for the cheese that makes the Valley famous.

In the private car in which the team was traveling eastward for the final games with the teams of that section, the players were sleeping, playing cards or reading to pass the time during the long daylight ride. In the seat opposite me, his long legs spread across the smoking-compartment, was Hardin, pitcher.

Hardin, for three years rated as one of the great pitchers of the country, was "going back." There was no concealing the fact. Hardin, while apparently as skilful, as fast, as good as ever, possessing all his speed and curves, with arm seemingly as flexible, was "going back." Five games in succession he had lost after having them won.

The manager, disgusted with the sequences of defeats, had told him he was a

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"quitter," which in baseball is the final accusation. His fellows believed that his arm had weakened until it no longer could withstand the strain of nine innings' pitching. Hardin remained aloof even from his best friends and spoke little, and he roomed alone, which was the worst sign of all.

The peculiar thing about it was that Hardin had lost all five games by "blowing up" in the eighth inning. After the fifth defeat it had been my painful duty to write as follows:

It looks as if Big Hank has either an acute attack of neckerino or a case of the mollycoddles in his whip. Putrefaction has set in somewhere, and unless antiseptics are applied soon a can shower may be expected.

Which, being translated from baseball, meant that either his heart rose into his throat or his arm was weak, and that he would be released unless he pitched better soon. Since that time Hardin had not spoken to me.

The river widened. A moment later the hills rushed together and cramped the water until it broke white under the pressure of the stones.

"Pretty, isn't it?" said Hardin thoughtfully.

"Yes. Ought to be fish in there," I remarked, rather surprised that he should break the silence.

"——!" he said with explosive emphasis. "I'd like to go fishing again; to be alone and go fishing, to go fishing."

"What's the matter with you?" I demanded, startled by his tone and manner.

"Nothing," said Hardin hopelessly, and lapsed into silence.

The train rushed past a little town set back in a niche in the hills and straggling downward along one street to where the factories rimmed the river.

"For Heaven's sake, talk!" said Hardin, anger and something near fear in his voice.

"All right," I agreed testily, being annoyed by his mood.

"I'll talk. I want to lecture you about nerves. They're putting you on the bum as a pitcher. If I were you I'd take a couple of weeks off and go fishing."

"I can't," he said hopelessly.

"See here, Hank," I argued, not understanding him. "We're eight games ahead and winning easily. Jack has four good pitchers and two others better than you are in your present shape. He don't need you. I doubt if he uses you on this trip anyhow. Get him to let you take a rest."

For a long time Hardin smoked in silence, brooding.

"I'll never be a good pitcher again," he said, with hopeless doggedness. "I'll stick as long as they'll pay me and then quit."

"Why, man, you're a fool. There's no reason——"

"Yes, there is," he snarled angrily. "You don't know everything. I'm done and I know it."

There was nothing to be gained by arguing. I lapsed into silence and watched the river, waiting for his mood to pass.

"Say!" demanded Hardin suddenly. "Can a man see a ghost with twenty thousand people around, and none of the others see him?"

"Been seeing ghosts too?" I inquired, meaning to make the tone sarcastic.

"Yes. In the eighth inning of every game I've pitched in the last month."

Hardin said it so simply and quietly that I jumped.

"I can't pitch to ghosts," he went on, speaking dully and in a hopeless monotone. "I lose my nerve and the game. That's why I'm done as a pitcher. If I didn't need the money I'd run now—so I wouldn't see it again."

"If your nerves are that bad," I protested, "you'd better get off at the next stop and start fishing."

"It isn't nerves—not the way you think," he explained quietly. "You remember Crimmons?"

"Yes," I said, for Jack Crimmons had been a friend.

"It's him," Hardin stated colorlessly.

There was nothing to say.

"CRIMMONS," repeated Hardin, after the train rounded the hill at Fort Plain. "I killed Crimmons."

"Oh, I remember," I said, understanding suddenly. "You pitched the ball?"

"Yes—I pitched it. I killed Crimmons," said Hardin, and fell silent again.

Jack Crimmons had been one of the newcomers into the league. He was a brilliant player and was advancing steadily in his profession, when a pitched ball struck him on the head. He was carried from the

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field unconscious, but recovered and tried to play again. A few weeks later he became insane, and a month before we had sent a floral wreath to be placed on his coffin.

"I killed Crimmons." Hardin was talking again as if to himself. "I did it on purpose."

"What?" The exclamation was forced from me.

"Yes, on purpose," he reiterated, without a change of tone. "Fast high ball pitched sidearm, shoulder high. You remember how I pitch that one with an outcurve motion and then jerk my body to the left and make it break in?"

"Yes——"

"Jack always stepped in on a curve ball. I broke that one at the back of his head. It killed him."

There was nothing to be said.

"You see," went on Hardin, "Jack and I were together in the minors. He played short for Omaha when I pitched there, and we were together again at Buffalo. We used to room together. I liked Jack."

He spoke simply, but a note of pain was in his voice.

"There was a girl in Buffalo," he continued, after watching the river a few moments. "Minnie Hernan her name was. Her brother was a carpenter, and she lived with him and worked in a store downtown. I wanted to marry her. Anyhow, when I was drafted Minnie and I had a half-way understanding. We were going to be married that Fall if I made good in the big league.

"Jack was still playing at Buffalo when I left. Minnie wrote to me for a time. Then she quit answering my letters; just quit without any quarrel or anything. I wrote to Jack and told him to find her, and he wrote she had moved away. It broke me all up.

"I decided to quit worrying and try to forget her. Sometimes I thought I had. I stopped off in Buffalo twice, looking for her. Some one told me the family had moved to Montreal. I wrote to her brother there and he wrote back, saying that Minnie had stayed in Buffalo when they left and that she had quit writing to them. He had heard she had a job in New York, but didn't know where."

We watched the river in silence for a time.

"You remember that every time the team played New York the fellows were always wanting to know where I went?" Hardin asked. "I thought I had forgotten Minnie, but whenever we got to New York I started walking. Man, I've walked thousands of miles around that town, up one street, down another, hoping to meet her. I've followed girls that looked like her for miles, wondering what I'd say to her if I found her, and whether she was married or not.

"In June we were playing there. Jack had just joined Brooklyn and we had a reunion. I was glad he'd managed to break into the big league. I was to pitch the first game in Brooklyn, and the night before I left Jack early and started to walk to the hotel where the team was stopping."

He was silent for a long time, staring out of the window.

"I met Minnie," he said quietly. "She was street-walking."

There was another silence.

"She told me Jack was to blame. He made love to her after I left."

His voice broke a little.

"Do you remember the game the next day? The score was 3 to 2 in our favor in the eighth inning, with one man out, when Jack came to bat. I hadn't spoken to him that day. I didn't dare. I think he must have suspected something was wrong.

"I had the thing all planned out in my head and knew exactly how he stepped in on a curve ball. I pitched him one curve. I turned my hand so as to let him see I was gripping the ball for a curve. Then I pitched that change shoot. This is the way."

Hardin illustrated carefully every motion.

"I pitched it fast, at the back of his head. He stepped in, jerked back and it caught him just back of the ear." There was nothing for me to say, so I watched the river.

"I WAS glad," said Hardin quietly. "Only I wished I could have told him why I did it. Do you think he knew I crossed him on purpose?"

"Perhaps," I said, thinking hard.

"I hope so," he responded without emotion. "I never pitched as well in my life as I did until he died. I decided if he got able to play again I'd get him with that ball. I practised it and it was effective. You remember the drive-away ball?"

"Yes."

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"You remember we got news that Jack was dead one morning?" he asked suddenly. "Well, I knew it the afternoon before. I was pitching against Baltimore; and in the eighth inning, when Merritt came to bat, I looked up and saw two batters.

"Merritt, as you know, bats left-handed. The other fellow was batting right-handed. It was Jack.

"I pitched one ball, trying to hit him again. He ducked right into it, and the ball went through his head. Then I went all to pieces and they had to take me out of the game. Four days later I pitched against Boston. In the eighth inning, with one out, Jack came up to bat with the other fellow. It has happened in every game since. It's driving me crazy."

"It's just your imagination," I argued. "You've been brooding over this thing until you think you killed him on purpose and believe you see him."

"No," he insisted hopelessly. "It's Jack, all right."

It was no use to argue, so I turned to the window. Presently Hardin went slowly out to his berth.

Two days later the manager decided to give him a chance against Brooklyn. The score was 5 to 2 with one man out in the eighth inning and Hardin was pitching magnificent ball. Two men were on bases through errors when Treadway came to bat. Hardin made a terrific wild pitch, Treadway dodged, and the ball went to the stand. When I looked again Hardin was deathly white and reeling in his position. Other players led him off the field, and he left us that night. He was found dead in his bed at home two weeks later.

MARGINAL FIGURES

By Albert Sonnichsen

ONE of the favorite stories of Everett Avery, the young American journalist, was always about that wild dash of his across Bulgaria into Turkey whereby he brought confusion to the plans of one of the Czar's Governors, but somehow one always felt that it was incomplete. And so it was, for Dr. Savrov's part in that episode was carefully suppressed by the three persons concerned, for reasons that will be obvious. Now the Doctor chooses to reveal the riddle he solved, through the marginal figures, in his forthcoming pamphlet on "Russia's Administrative Machinery" (published by Guerin & Cie. of Paris), devoting just ten lines to what is certainly one of his most important feats of ingenious deduction.

Avery, who always did give Savrov the credit of an important part in the affair, invariably insists on beginning with a dissertation on that bad habit of his, lying abed late of mornings. If he had been an early riser of industrious inclinations, he argues, Savrov would not have found him in his room that morning in Odessa, would have gone to his own room, had breakfast sent up, and—the calamity would have come

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on, suspected by no one. From which he draws the conclusion that by no means should he discontinue a bad habit from which so much good has come.

But he grows more serious as he goes on, for the story is grim enough in its possibilities. You get beyond his late morning snooze, to where the bell boy rudely awoke him with the announcement that a gentleman wished to see him. The gentleman appeared and closed the door behind him. And a gentleman he certainly was, in external appearance.

Though he wore a heavy caped cloak over his shoulders, his well cut frock coat was visible underneath, in the lapel of which glowed a red carnation. His iron-gray mustaches were stiffly waxed and his beard was trimmed to a neat goatee. In the crook of his arm he carried a shiny top hat. As he entered he bowed ceremoniously. Avery sat up with a jerk.

"Why!" he gasped.

"Good morning, sir," began the gentleman, "I observe zat you have not yet rise. Parrdon my intrusion, but ze hour is late enough to expect——"

"Why!" repeated Avery. "It's Savrov, and then again, it isn't."

"Shhh. Not zat name. Zere is not such person in Russia. I am—— But here is my card. Monsieur Maximilian de Vigny, agent for ze Tyneside Agricultural Machine Manufacturing Company. But you are not a farmer?"

Avery leaped out of bed and seized Monsieur de Vigny's hand.

"Anyhow, drop the accent," he laughed. "Nobody around here knows English as fine as all that. What mischief brings you here?"

Savrov smiled. He carefully removed his overcoat.

"Odessa will be one of the most interesting districts in all Russia, now that the Duma elections are coming on," he said, in his natural, crisp English—too crisp, in fact, for a genuine Briton. "Here the Jewish element swells the strength of the radical parties. If left alone they will send every Socialist candidate to the Duma with a heaping majority, especially as the Socialist Revolutionists are not putting up any candidates. Now, can you believe that the Little White Father will permit this?"

"There will be a certain amount of intimidation," replied Avery, "but so far, I must admit, the local authorities have done nothing to check the campaign agitators. The meetings aren't disturbed; it seems almost like home."

"Yes, I know," assented Savrov, "and that's why I am suspicious. I would like to know what instructions are being sent out from Petersburg. Here's a big problem that's puzzled me before. Whenever the Ministry of the Interior assumes a new attitude, either against the Jews or the Revolutionists, all the Provincial Governors take their cues simultaneously.

"How do they keep in such close touch? Not by post or telegraph, as the ordinary administrative business is done, for most of the clerks, even the higher officials, are radicals, and any workable cipher can be unraveled. A leakage would be an absolute certainty. Again, they could not employ couriers, as they do with diplomatic messages to foreign Governments. That would require too many, and a courier, to be safe, must be an official of some rank.

"No, it is some system whereby constant communication is kept up with the Governors without the knowledge of intermediary officials. Whatever the system, it must be quite busy now, for I am convinced that some mischief is brewing which will affect the elections in all the radical districts; something that would wither in the light of publicity.

"Well, I am keeping a sharp lookout; Fortune, or Chance, always favors those who coöperate with her. At any rate, we must have publicity here. You are here and—where is Guerin? Did he present my letter?"

"Yes, but he left for Bulgaria last night. He'll be back for the elections. Meanwhile he's gone to study Russian intrigues in the Balkans."

SAVROV'S brows lowered.

"The deuce! Well, he's a man of his word. I especially want him to be here, for he is not only correspondent to the Paris *Bulletin*, but he is also part owner. A true Progressive, a terrible enemy to the anti-Semites, and yet his paper has a powerful influence even among the Conservatives. Did you take him around?"

"Yes, we saw the Acting Governor yesterday; drunk as a swine again, but too canny to let out a word. The fat rake! He drinks vodka like a *mujik*, but the drunker he is the smoother he talks."

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"Aha," laughed Savrov. "Poor Minn, your pet aversion. You can not forget that little matter of sentiment between you. But patience, my friend. He is a capable man. They will make him Governor—I can not help thinking that his promotion will depend on how he manipulates the coming elections. Yet we shall trip him up some day. He is dangerous, like a firearm; but you have only to put a cork in the muzzle and it bursts."

"Confound him," growled the American. "There's a limit to my patience. Here I've accepted a post from the *Courier*, the blamedest reptile sheet in all England; and what have I accomplished? Your scientific methods are slow."

"I wanted you to come here," replied Savrov, "because, if we are to catch him, he must be watched constantly. But anyhow," he added with a mischievous smile, "your friend is here again."

Avery colored.

"All the more reason," continued Savrov seriously, "why you should concentrate every faculty to help me. I am convinced there will be trouble and—your revolutionary friends never avoid it. Keep your eyes open. Tell me what you see, no matter how insignificant. We must anticipate them. But I see you are dressed now. Where do you breakfast?"

Avery led the way downstairs to the café. It was late, so only a few people remained at the small tables, on which were served the Continental breakfast—coffee and rolls.

In a corner sat a stout gentleman in official uniform, sipping coffee and reading a paper. He raised his face and nodded ponderously to Avery. When they seated themselves, in an opposite corner, the official's broad back was turned to them.

"Minn's confidential secretary," murmured Avery. Savrov only raised his brows.

"Would you like a paper?" Avery suggested. "What do you read?"

"Yes, the *Novoe Vremya*. You might ask for it and look it over. Read me off the headlines. I am not supposed to read a Russian paper by preference."

Avery called the waiter.

"Captain Levin has the *Novoe Vremya*," whispered the waiter, rolling his eyes toward the stout official.

"Shall I send out——" began Avery.

"No, leave it. I am tired, anyhow. Perhaps he will finish soon."

"Hardly. He usually reads till past ten. Easy job, his."

Savrov did not reply immediately. He was watching Minn's secretary closely.

"What a head for a phrenologist," he commented cynically. "Like a watermelon laid on top of a bag of grain. Why is a *tchinovnik* always fat and bald and bewhiskered? Gormands and rakes, all of them."

"He is pretty torpid," admitted Avery. "Good-natured fellow, though, in spite of his ponderosity."

"Perhaps; a good *pater familias*, but there is no room under that rolling dome for an idea beyond office routine. Such a man would hang an icon in his parlor and a Rubens in his kitchen."

Avery laughed.

"So far as I know him you've sized him up correctly. Yet what's he reading there? The fifth page; dramatic criticisms, book reviews. We've misjudged him, Doctor."

"The deuce!"

Savrov made no other comment just then. But Avery observed that his eyes never left the secretary's huge back.

"Does he write critiques, too?" he asked suddenly.

The secretary had laid down his paper and was fingering a pencil over a small paper pad.

"At any rate," continued Savrov, "he has turned to the seventh page now, the advertisements and commercial notices. His interests are broad."

Presently the secretary arose, laid down some coins and walked out of the café. A moment later the waiter brought the paper to Avery. As the café was now empty save for themselves, Savrov took it and began turning over the pages.

"Here are the critiques," he said. "Yes, a lengthy criticism of 'Faust,' now being presented in Petersburg. I saw it a week ago—excellent. Rather technical, it seems. Is your fat friend a musician? And here is an essay on Modernism in the drama—against, of course—and a violent attack on Tolstoy. What would the *Novoe Vremya* do without Tolstoy? And that is all on this page."

"Eh, my friend, you tell me seriously that the gentleman with the barrel head and the hanging jowls finds this entertaining?

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Hallo! What have we here? He has scribbled on the margin—not an essay, only figures; two, five, six, three. Ah, now we get it. The numbers of his stock certificates. He looks like one who might have a snug investment in some safe enterprise."

AT THE time Avery took these running comments as being the idle utterances of a fatigued man, for Savrov had arrived early that morning. They finished breakfast and returned upstairs, Savrov to his room, which was across the corridor from Avery's.

"I'll leave you to a nap," remarked Avery. "Anyway, I've got a luncheon appointment. We'll talk business this afternoon."

He went out and did not return until shortly before the dinner hour. Savrov was in his room, stretched out on a divan.

"I shall have my dinner sent up," he said. "I am busy now; we can talk tomorrow."

That evening Avery went to the theater with Thorpe of the London *Times*, partly to amuse himself, and partly to sound the old journalist as to what his opinions were of the Government's attitude toward the elections. It was past midnight when he returned. He had just got into bed and was about to turn out the light when a tapping at his door checked him. In response to his call Savrov entered, still dressed and visibly excited.

"The deuce!" he exclaimed impatiently. "I thought you would make a night of it. Come, there's no sleep for you tonight. See what has fallen into my hands—a copy of secret instructions sent by the Minister of the Interior to local authorities!"

He passed Avery a slip of paper on which was written, in Russian:

MINN:
Demonstration should begin on the twelfth. Disregard instructions by telegraph unless in new cipher. Withdraw military for maneuvers; then let them strike for forty-eight hours.

"You understand?" Savrov almost shouted.

Then he suppressed himself as he continued.

"A pogrom—the Jewish quarters will be sacked. But this is aimed less at the Jews than at the Social Democrats. A race riot is a convenient pretext to drive them out of their electoral districts. This is Friday morning, the eighth. We have just four days."

"Holy smoke!" gasped Avery. "The first thing——"

Without knowing why, he began putting on his clothes again.

"Publicity!" cried Savrov. "Come, let us think it out. Your *Courier* would——"

"Not if you sent the original document signed and sworn to by the Czar," interrupted Avery, with bitter emphasis.

"And Thorpe, of the *Times?*"

"Count him out too. He'd call it sensational. The *Times* is a family paper. How about your Bureau?"

"The Bureau does not syndicate telegraphic news. The editors would hold up my despatch until they could verify it, and I can not expose my source of information—at least, not over the wires. We must have the despatch published not later than Monday morning, in some prominent European journal. I see nothing else to do; I must leave for Paris early in the morning. There is barely time. If only Guerin had stayed! But who could have foreseen that trouble would begin so early!"

"He can't have got beyond Sofia!" replied Avery. "I can overtake him."

Savrov thought a moment.

"Yes," he agreed, "that is our most hopeful course. It is one now. The Varna boat leaves at three. But my passport isn't viséd. You must go."

"You'll warn—them?"

"At once. But you know them—they'll stay and fight. The thing is to prevent. I can not send my proofs with you, nor is there time to explain everything now. When you come back! But for the sake of Guerin's partners I shall guarantee ten thousand francs to the accuracy of my information and be responsible for all libel suits—I only wish it would come to that. Guerin knows me long and well enough to value that. I shall make it out in legal form."

He hastened across the corridor while Avery finished dressing and packed a grip. In ten minutes Savrov reappeared.

"Here is the guarantee, a copy of the instructions sent to Minn, and a tentative form of the despatch we want sent."

He paused, then approached Avery until their faces were close together.

"Another idea occurs to me," he whispered. "When you fight the devil you can

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not observe the finest etiquette. Our chance has come. You and Guerin saw Minn yesterday—and he was drunk. Eh?"

Avery's eyes blazed. He took the envelope, gripped Savrov's hand and was gone.

When the sun rose Avery was out on the Black Sea with the Russian coast a purple haze on the starboard quarter. All that tedious day he tramped the deck, even until eight that night, when the steamer docked in Varna. The train for the Bulgarian capital left at ten. While he waited he sent a telegram:

Wait; I am coming on important business.

He directed a copy to be delivered in every hotel in Sofia where foreigners stopped. At ten no answer had yet come. At seven next morning he arrived in Sofia. By luck he struck the right hotel at once; the French journalist had been there, but he had left for the Turkish frontier the day before, *via* Kustendil. The daily train which went half way had just left, but a good phaeton could do almost as well. He would be at the frontier that night. Fortunately again, he found a phaeton at once, and sent another telegram ahead to Kustendil.

AT NOON he was in Radomir, the railroad terminus, but there was no answer to his telegram. He secured a relay and continued on over the mountains. At five he rolled into a small semi-Turkish town, Kustendil. Again he was late; Monsieur Guerin had left for the frontier that morning, two hours before the telegram had come.

Avery felt the cold perspiration down his legs now. Here it was Saturday night, and the despatch must be published in Paris Monday. He must not only overtake Guerin within twenty-four hours, but he must also get him to a telegraph station within that time.

By promise of big payment he secured another phaeton. The local prefect could grant him a limited pass over the frontier, for he had not had time to have his passport viséd before the Turkish Commissariat in Sofia.

It was dark before his four-horse phaeton dashed out on the highway toward the mountain ridge which was the frontier. At ten they reached the posts. The Frenchman had passed at noon; Avery had gained on him.

Dawn was breaking as they reached the first town, Kumanovo. Guerin had passed the night there and was only two hours ahead. But the next telegraph station was at Skoplje, twelve hours away. If Guerin arrived there first he might take the train for Salonica and—well, this was the last chance.

An hour was lost in getting a relay, but the horses were good and fifty francs the inducement. They buzzed over the mountain road.

At nine they drew up at a *hahn*, a wayside inn, but flew on again at once. Guerin had breakfasted there an hour before. Avery was gaining, but he must get Guerin at Skoplje before dark. The transmission of the telegram would require several hours and *Le Bulletin* went to press around midnight. Fortunately, Paris time was over an hour later; and it was Sunday. The wires would not be so busy.

It was nearing noon. From loss of sleep and from nervous excitement Avery was beginning to see red shadows before his eyes. And then, coming to the brow of a rise, the driver cried out, whipped up his horses and the phaeton tore down grade.

The road wound down into a valley, crossing a river in the middle. A black speck was climbing the opposite rise; it was a phaeton.

As they reached the bridge they were barely half a mile behind the other phateon. And though there was nothing to be gained by it, Avery and the driver yelled, but the breeze bore back their voices. Avery wanted to get out and run.

The phaeton ahead stopped. Avery recognized the Frenchman's familiar figure, standing and looking backward. And then he realized that he had Guerin, that he had given his own driver fifty francs, had leaped into the other phaeton and was shouting:

"Drive! Drive! We must be in Skoplje before dark! Hurry on! A hundred lives may depend on it!"

Gradually it dawned on him that Guerin was immensely astonished. He produced the envelope and talked, rapidly and in exclamations. He saw the excitement come into Guerin's face.

"Mother of Heaven!" cried the Frenchman. "There can be no mistake? Fly on, driver! Five gold napoleons if you get us into Skoplje before dark! I believe these

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benighted savages close their telegraph offices for prayer. But if—— No, Savrov makes no mistakes. What a tremendous thing for the paper! Every European journal will comment on it! But we must prove it if no pogrom takes place. I will return with you."

Then came the reaction. Avery sank into a doze. When he awoke they were pounding up the main street of Skoplje and the sky was still light. The phaeton stopped; they leaped out and into the telegraph office. They sent Savrov's form as it was, except that Avery interpolated just one sentence, and Guerin added several hundred words.

An hour later they were aboard a northbound train, for Belgrade. From Servia they passed back into Bulgaria, and late Monday night they were out on the Black Sea, bound for Odessa.

THE steamer docked early in the forenoon. It was Tuesday, the twelfth. Both men repressed an intense excitement. They hired an *izvotchik* and were driven up into the city. About the docks, at least, there was no unusual commotion.

They swung around a corner and came into a slowly marching throng of people, men and boys and even some women. Some at the head carried icons and banners. A group of priests droned a religious chant, to which the mob responded at intervals with a low roar.

"Only a religious procession," said Guerin. But Avery was pale.

"You don't know how a pogrom is started," he replied. "Somebody, presumably a Jew, will fire, or throw a brick, at them. See, they are headed for the Jewish quarter."

As they drove on the throng increased. Already the booming chant was dying away; the rear of the procession was less solemn, more disordered.

"Long live the Czar!" shouted a voice, and others took it up with:

"God and the Czar! Long live the True Russians!"

"There's the stinger," Avery grated between his teeth. "Hello! There's the Doctor over there!"

There were several vehicles up along the curb. In one sat Savrov. Avery and Guerin discharged their driver and sprang in with him. They could just hear each other above the increasing uproar.

"Was the despatch——"

"Yes. Sunday night. A reply reached us in Varna that it was published. Have you warned them?"

"Yes, the women are in a safe place. But the men are armed. There will be a fight!"

"Then our despatch has not worked!" exclaimed the Frenchman. "We should see the consuls."

"I have," replied Savrov. "The French and the English. We telephoned the Governor; he is out of town: The military are away, too. You see, my information verifies itself. Heavens, but I shall make a scandal of this!"

The procession was really approaching the Jewish quarter. And then happened a movement such as you may observe in a drove of cattle when the leaders stampede. The long line of the procession broke up what order it had and crumpled back on itself.

A roar of shouts rose, rolling back and forth. A bare-headed priest, his long hair undone and scattered over his shoulders, his red face perspiring and twitching with intense excitement, was dashing back through the crowd.

"The Yidds!" he bellowed. "The cursed Yidds! They have attacked the holy icons!"

The rest of his shouts were submerged in a sudden wave of sound. Some of the nearest could be heard yelling:

"Down with the Jews! Kill the blood-drinkers! Save the icons!"

Suddenly the mob swung forward after the dust-covered priest, whose hoarse bellows again became audible. Ahead rose the sound of splintering glass and the crash of timbers, intermingled with a few revolver shots. On a housetop, a block away, crouched a dozen black figures. They were firing down on the mob.

Savrov gripped Avery's arm and shook him, then pointed backward, up the street through which they had followed the procession. "See!" he shouted. "Minn has had a telegram from St. Petersburg! They have come in all the way from the maneuvers!"

A solid mass of tan and gray came silently onward, from curb to curb, the sun scintillating brilliantly on the row of flashing sabers. The driver had also seen the

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approaching danger, for he jammed his horses up on the sidewalk and almost into the iron shutters of a closed store.

There were no preliminary challenges, not even a shout of command. The troop of Cossacks drove through the turbulent throng with the impact of a solid body, scattering it into doorways and side streets. When the whirling clouds of dust in the wake of the cavalry settled, the street was bare, save for a few running and dodging figures.

"I never felt like cheering Russian soldiers before," cried Savrov, with keen exultation. "Guerin, that is the best single blow your *Bulletin* has ever struck."

"You think, then——"

"Of course, a telegram came. You may now count on one steady subscriber—the Russian embassy in Paris. Come, let us go back to the hotel."

An hour later they were smoking and drinking coffee in Savrov's room, while Avery told of his race after Guerin. There came a pause. Then Guerin spoke.

"Now, Doctor, you have certainly done a great thing for my *Bulletin*. I think I have proved my confidence in you, too, but——"

Savrov smiled.

"You also want to know how I got the information, eh?"

"Haven't we earned it?" put in Avery.

"Gentlemen, I shall oblige you on the condition that you keep my secret. While I was ready to sacrifice it in case of great need, I still believe that the good that might come of revealing it is too uncertain as against the tremendous use to which I can put it if it is not revealed. Through it I shall now be able to plumb the deepest pools of the Government's depravity."

SAVROV turned to a shelf above his writing-table and drew down a bundle of newspapers. On top was the number of the *Novoe Vremya* with the figures scribbled along the margin.

"Well, friend Avery," he continued, "I have solved the problem we discussed the morning I came: How the Ministry of the Interior issues delicate instructions without committing itself to paper. The credit is due to you in calling my attention to the literary recreations of Minn's secretary at breakfast.

"I am a fair physiognomist and phrenologist. I have never completely failed in my conclusions. Fortunately, many of my subjects are bald. Well, I carefully studied Captain Levin, and when I saw what he read I was positive he was not indulging in pleasant recreation. Here was a beginning my mind jumped at, though I was still unconscious of what it would lead to. The figures also excited my interest. I began pondering.

"I suddenly remembered that the Revolutionists often arrange meetings or communicate with each other by inserting advertisements in the papers. By prearranged understandings a house to let or a purse lost may convey the information. The security of this method lies in that nobody could even guess where to look for such notices. The police know this as well as I.

"While pondering over this my eyes traveled over the advertising page and halted here, where this lottery is advertised. You see, it is a limited, private lottery with big premiums and big prizes; a gambling enterprise. The drawings are monthly, but every day or so the tickets that are sold are listed by their numbers opposite the initials of the purchasers' names.

"Now observe what caught my eye. Here, on the margin of the preceding page, the secretary, not noticing that he was not writing on his pad, jotted down the figures 2 5 6 3. Now turn over to the advertisement. It is part of the number of the first ticket—256,358,679. Of course, so far I raised only the supposition that the secretary gambled. But the initials, C. F. A., were not his. Of course, again I proved nothing; it only encouraged me to go on.

"Then it struck me that all the numbers were in sets of nine figures, yet not in sequence, as you might expect from tickets. The first began with two, the second with seven and the third with five, differences that would indicate three hundred thousand tickets in between.

"Again, I noticed that each set of three was progressive, like 256 and 358, each figure greater than the one before, till it came to the comma, when they began again. Next the regularity of the column of initials attracted my attention; the three letters seemed to me to correspond with the three sets of figures in some way. All this began to suggest a cipher key.

"I looked at the first article. The second sentence began with C, the third with F and the fourth with A. That was suggested

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to me by a poem that was sent to a conservative ecclesiastical paper and published, praising a certain bishop. A week later another paper, inspired by the author of the poem, no doubt, called attention to the fact that if you read only the first letter of each line, in order, they spelled, 'He is an ass after all.'

"The second word of the C sentence was *misel* (thought). I put down the letter M. The fifth word was *interesno* (interesting). I put down I. The sixth word was *ne* (not). I put down N. There was the first set of figures.

"Then came the sentence beginning with F, the second initial. The first figure of the second set was 3; the third word was *nam* (us). And so I went on, until I had the whole message, with MINN as the first word."

"*Mon Dieu!*" exclaimed Monsieur Guerin. "Can not we expose this perfidy?"

Savrov smiled cynically.

"Reason it out logically," he replied. "How could you prove it? The writers of the articles, some of them reputable authors, whatever their opinions, are above suspicion. The lottery is the key. Well, a scapegoat is cheap; the manager of the lottery will confess his connivance in a scheme to create a journalistic sensation that shall discredit the Government—a clever Revolutionists' plot.

"Yes, if this system is kept up for some years and continues to concur with current events—— But I can not trace it back through the files further than just after the Potemkin mutiny. Perhaps it was carried on through another paper before that. Sometimes the ciphers read nonsense, evidently for the purpose of confounding any possible exposure.

"No, the only danger was just such an accident as that fool mistaking the margin of the paper for his pad, thus putting the key into the hands of some person who would not expose, but secretly continue using it to his own ends. That is exactly what I shall do.

"Otherwise the system was perfect. We shall institute a similar one with our agents."

Late that evening Avery went down into the café alone for a black coffee. Savrov was asleep and Guerin busy in his room turning out copy for the morning mail to Paris. As he seated himself Avery heard his name called. Thorpe of the *Times* joined him.

"Hello, old man," he greeted. "Deuce of a row this morning. I missed it—went out to the maneuvers."

"Have you seen the Vice-Governor?" asked Avery.

"Confounded shame," growled the Englishman. "What! Haven't heard? Some French paper published an interview with him, said he was drunk and hinted that he gave out his plans for slaughtering the Jews. I don't believe it. Anyhow, the Governor was sent back—came this evening—and Minn's been transferred to some Siberian Province or other. Nasty deal for the old soldier after his promptness this morning. I say, you ought to give him a good write-up in the *Courier;* he's been a good fellow."

"I'd like to," replied Avery grimly.

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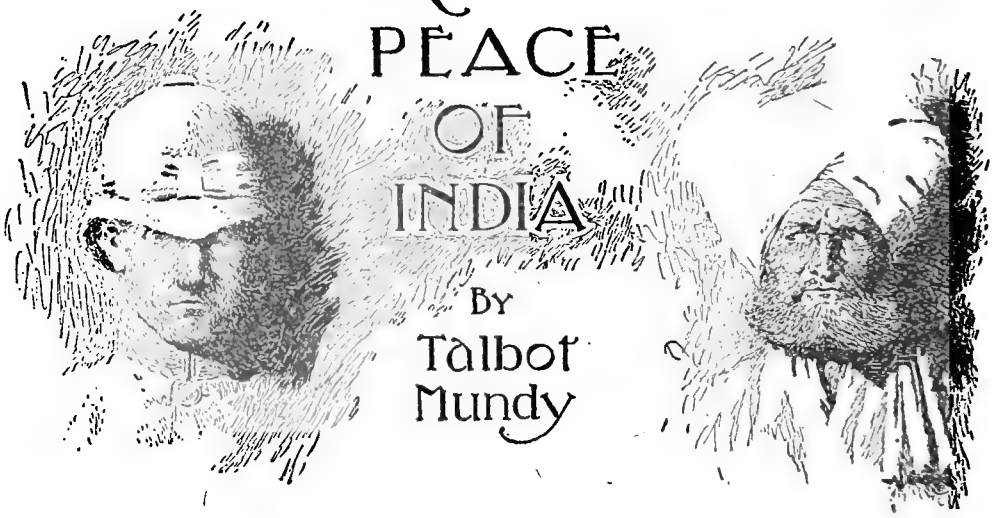
FOR THE PEACE OF INDIA



By Talbot Mundy

SYNOPSIS—In common with every native of India, **Mohammed Gunga**—the big Rajput who had been an officer in the late Colonel Cunningham's now disbanded but still famous regiment of native cavalry—foresaw the Sepoy Rebellion of 1857. The English, however, would not be warned. In preparing against the catastrophe Mohammed Gunga had two things to do: he had to guard **Rosemary McClean**, a twenty-year-old girl who was helping her missionary father, **Duncan McClean**, to put down suttee in Howrah City; and he had also to provide an English leader whom native troops would follow in the coming conflict.

Mohammed Gunga leaves **Ali Partab**, his squire, at Howrah City, with directions to take Rosemary and her father to the fortress of his cousin **Alwa** whenever they ask for protection. Ali Partab, however, is kidnapped by the retainers of **Jaimihr,** the scheming brother of the **Maharaja Howrah,** who plans to seize the throne and abduct Rosemary as soon as the revolt breaks out. Both Jaimihr and Howrah also watch the Duncans so closely that they can neither leave the city nor communicate with their friends.

Meantime Colonel Cunningham's son **Ralph** has arrived in India as a subaltern. In him Mohammed Gunga sees the leader the native troops require; and under the tutelage of the Rajput, Ralph rises rapidly, until his jealous superiors, in order to get rid of him, "promote" him to become Resident at Howrah. While these events are in progress, Alwa is warned by Rosemary's native duenna, **Joanna**. He rescues Ali Partab and obtains the missionaries from Howrah in exchange for his promise to support the latter on the throne against all comers.

CHAPTER XXII

They've called thee by an evil word,
They've named thee traitor, friend o' mine;
Thou askest faith? I send my sword—
There is no greater, friend o' mine.

T. M.

RALPH CUNNINGHAM said good by to Brigadier General Byng—Byng the Brigadier—with more feeling of regret and disappointment than he cared to show. A born soldier, he did his hard-mouthed utmost to refrain from whining; he even pretended that a political appointment was a recognizable advance along the road to sure success—or, rather, pretended that he thought it was; and the Brigadier, who knew men and particularly young men, detected instantly the telltale expression of the honest gray eyes, analyzed it, and, to Cunningham's amazement, approved the unwilling make-believe.

"Now, buck up, Cunningham!" he said, slapping him familiarly on the shoulder. "You're making a good game effort to hide chagrin, and you're a good game ass for your pains. There isn't one man in all India who has half your luck at this minute, if you only knew it; but go ahead, and find out for yourself!

"Go to Abu and report, but waste no more time there than you can help. Hurry on to Howrah, and, once you're there, if Mohammed Gunga tells you what looks like a lie, trust him to the hilt!"

"Is he coming with me, then?" asked Cunningham, in some amazement.

"Yes, unofficially. He has relations in that neighborhood, and wants to visit them; he is going to take advantage of your pack train and escort. You'll have a small escort as far as Abu; after that you'll be expected to look out for yourself. The escort is made up of details traveling down country; they'll leave you at Abu Road."

So, still unbelieving, still wondering why the Brigadier should go to all that trouble to convince him that politics in a half forgotten native State was fair meat for a soldier, Cunningham rode off at the head of a variously made up traveling party, grudging every step of that wonderful mare Mohammed Gunga had given him, that bore him away from the breeze-swept North, away from the mist-draped hills he had already learned to love, ever down, down, down into the hell-baked plains.

Each rest house where he spent a night was but another brooding-place of discontentment and regret; each little petty detail connected with the command of the motley party (mainly time-expired men, homeward bound) was drudgery; each Hindu pugree that he met was but a beastly contrast, or so it seemed to him, to the turbans of the troop that but a week ago had thundered at his back.

More than any other thing, Mohammed Gunga's cheerfulness amazed him. He resented it. He did not see why the man who had expressed such interest in the good fortune of his father's son should not be sympathetic, now that his soldier career had been nipped so early in the bud. He began to lose faith in Mohammed Gunga's wisdom, and was glad when the ex-rissaldar chose to bring up the rear of the procession, instead of riding by his side.

But, behind in Peshawur, there was one man at least who knew Mohammed Gunga and his worth, and who refused to let himself be blinded by any sort of circumstantial evidence. The evidence was black—in black on white—written by a black-hearted schemer, and delivered by a big, fat black man who was utterly road-weary, to the Commissioner in person.

The Sepoy Mutiny, that had been planned so carefully, had started to take charge too soon. News had arrived of native regiments whose officers had been obliged against their will to disarm and disband them, and the loyalty of other regiments was seriously called in question.

But the men whose blindness was responsible for the possibility of mutiny were only made blinder by the evidence of coming trouble. With a dozen courses open to them, any one of which might have saved the situation, they deliberately chose a thirteenth—a two-forked toboggan slide into destruction. To prove their misjudged confidence in the native Army, they actually disbanded the Irregulars led by Byng the Brigadier, removed the European soldiers wherever possible from ammunition magazine guard duty, replacing them with native companies, and reprimanded the men whose clear sight showed them how events were shaping.

They reprimanded Byng, as if depriving him of his command were not enough. When he protested, as he had a right to do, they showed him Jaimihr's letter.

"Mohammed Gunga told you, did he? Look at this!"

The letter, most concisely and pointedly written, considering the indirect phraseology and caution of the East, deliberately accused Mohammed Gunga and a certain Alwa, together with all the Rangars of a whole province, of scheming with Maharaja Howrah to overthrow the British rule. It recommended the immediate arrest of Mohammed Gunga and stern measures against the Rangars.

"What do you propose to do about it?" inquired Byng.

"It's out of our province. A copy of this letter has been sent to the proper quarter, and no doubt the story will be investigated. There have been all kinds of stories about suttee being practised in Howrah, and it very likely won't be difficult to find a plausible excuse for deposing the Maharaja and putting Jaimihr in his place. In the meantime, if Mohammed Gunga shows himself in these parts, he'll be arrested."

Byng did then the sort of thing that was fortunately characteristic of the men who rose in the nick of time to seize the reins. He hurried to his quarters, packed in its case the sword of honor that had once been given him by his Queen, and despatched it without a written line of comment to Mohammed Gunga. The native who took it was ordered to ride full pelt, overtake Mohammed Gunga on the road to Abu, present the sword without explanation, and return.

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Cunningham, in spite of himself, had traveled swiftly. The moon lacked two nights of being full, and two more days would have seen him climbing up the fourteen-mile rock road that leads up the purple flanks of Abu, when the ex-trooper of Irregulars cantered from a dust cloud, caught up with Mohammed Gunga, who was riding, as usual, in the rear, and handed him the sword. He held it out with both hands. Mohammed Gunga seized it by the middle, and neither said a word for the moment.

In silence Mohammed Gunga drew the blade, saw Byng's name engraved close to the hilt, recognized the sword, and knew the sender; thought—and mistook the meaning.

"Was there no word?"

"None."

"Then take this word back. 'I will return the sword, with honor added to it, when the peace of India is won.' Say that, and nothing else."

"I would rest my horse for a day or two," said the trooper.

"Neither thou nor yet thy horse will have much rest this side of Eblis!" said Mohammed Gunga. "Ride!"

THE trooper wheeled and went, with a grin and a salute which he repeated twice, leaning back from the saddle for a last look at the man of his own race whom Byng had chosen to exalt. He felt himself honored merely to have carried the sword. Mohammed Gunga removed his own great saber and handed it to one of his own five whom he overtook. Then he buckled on the sword of honor, and spurred until he rode abreast of Cunningham, a hundred yards or more ahead of the procession.

"Sahib," he asked, "Did Byng Bahadur say a word or two about listening to me?"

"He did. Why?"

"Because I will now say things!"

The fact that the Brigadier had sent no message other than the sword was probably the Rajput's chief reason for talking in riddles still to Cunningham. The silence went straight to his Oriental heart—so to speak, set the key for him to play to. But he knew, too, that Cunningham's youth would be a handicap, should it come to argument. What he was looking for was not a counselor, or some one to make plans, for the plans had all been laid and cross-laid by the enemy and Mohammed Gunga knew it.

He needed a man of decision, to be flung blindfold into unexpected and unexpecting hell-wrath and lead—take charge, decide on the instant, and lead the way out again, with men behind him who would recognize decision when they saw it. So he spoke darkly. He understood that the sword meant, "Things have started"; so, with a soldier's courage, he proceeded to head Cunningham toward the spot where the row was loose.

"Say ahead!" smiled Cunningham.

"Yonder, sahib, lies Abu. Yonder to the right lies thy road now, not forward."

"I have orders to report at Abu."

"And I, sahib, orders to advise!"

"Are you advising me to disobey orders?"

The Rajput hesitated.

"Sahib, have I anything to gain," he asked, "by offering the wrong advice?"

"I can't imagine so."

"I advise now that we—thou and I, sahib, and my five—turn off here—yonder, where the other trail runs—letting the party proceed to Abu without us."

"But, why, Mohammed Gunga?"

"There is need of haste, sahib. At Abu there will be delay—much talk with Everton sahib, and—who knows?—perhaps cancellation of the plan to send thee on to Howrah."

"I'd be mighty glad, Mohammed Gunga, not to have to go there!"

"Sahib, look! What is this I wear?"

"Which?"

"See here, sahib; this."

For the first time Cunningham noticed the fine European workmanship on the sword hilt, and realized that the Rajput's usual plain, workmanlike weapon had been replaced.

"That is Byng Bahadur's sword of honor! It reached me a few minutes ago. The man who brought it is barely out of sight. It means, sahib, that the hour to act is come!"

"But——"

"Sahib, this sending thee to Howrah is my doing! Since the day when I first heard that the son of Pukka Cunnigan Bahadur was on his way, I have schemed, and planned, and contrived to this end. It was at word from me that Byng Bahadur signed the transfer papers; otherwise he would have kept thee by him.

"There are owls, old women, men whom

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Allah has deprived of judgment, drunkards, fools, in charge at Peshawur and in other places; but there are certain men who know. Byng Bahadur knows. I know; and I will show the way! Let me lead, sahib, for a little while, and I will show thee what to lead!"

"But——"

"Does this sword, sahib, mean nothing? Did Byng Bahadur send it me for fun?"

"But what's the idea? I can't disobey orders, and ride off to anywhere without some excuse. You'll have to tell me why. What's the matter? What's happening?"

"Byng Bahadur sent not one word to me when he sent this sword. To thee he said, "Listen to Mohammed Gunga, even when he seems to lie!' I know that, for he told me he had said it. To me he said 'Take charge, Mohammed Gunga, when the hour comes, and rub his innocent young nose hard as you like into the middle of the mess!' Aye, sahib, so said he. It is now that I take charge."

"But——"

" 'But!' said the nilgau, and the wolf pack had him. 'But!' said the tiger, and the trapdoor shut. 'But!' said the Hindu, and a priest betrayed him. But—but—but! I never knew thy father make much use of that word!"

"Yes—*but*—I have my orders, Mohammed Gunga."

"Sahib! This sword is a sword of honor. It stands for Byng Bahadur's honor. I have it in my keeping. Mine own honor is a matter somewhat dear to me, and I have kept it clean these many years. Now I ask to keep thine honor, too, a while—making three men's honor. If I fail, then thou and I and Byng Bahadur all go down together in good company. If I fail not, then, sahib ——Allah is contented when His honor stands!"

Cunningham drew rein, and looked him in the eyes. Gray eyes met brown, and neither flinched. Each read what men of mettle only can read when they see it—the truth, the fearlessness, the thought they understand because it lives with them. Cunningham held out his hand.

Some thirty minutes later, Cunningham, Mohammed Gunga and the five, with a much diminished mule train bumping in their wake, were headed westward on a dry, hot trail, while the time-expired and convalescent escort plodded southward. The escort carried word that Cunningham had heard of trouble to the West and had turned off to investigate it.

CHAPTER XXIII

Quoth the little red jackal, famishing: "Lo,
Yonder a priest and a soldier go.
You can see farthest, and you ought to know;
Which shall I travel with, carrion crow?"
The crow cawed back at him: "Ignorant beast!
Soldiers get glory, but none of the feast;
Soldiers work hardest, and gobble the least;
Take my advice on it, Follow the priest!"

T. M.

IT WAS two hours after sunrise on the second day that followed Cunningham's desertion of his party when he and Mohammed Gunga first caught sight of a blue, baked rock rising sheer out of a fringe of green on the dazzling horizon. It was a freak of nature—a point pushed through the level crust of bone-dry earth, and left to glitter there alone.

"That is my cousin Alwa's place!" exclaimed Mohammed Gunga, and he seemed to draw a world of consolation from the fact.

The sight loosed his tongue at last; he rode by Cunningham, and deigned an explanation now, at least of what had led to what might happen. Although he wasted little breath on prophecy, he was eloquent in building up a basis from which Cunningham might draw his own deductions. They had ridden through the cool of the night in easy stages, and should have camped at dawn; but Mohammed Gunga had insisted that the tired animals could carry them for three hours longer.

"A soldier's horse must rest at the other end, sahib," he had laughed. "Who knows that they have not sent from Abu to arrest both thee and me?"

And he had not vouchsafed another word until, over the desert glare, his cousin's aerie had blazed out, beating back the molten sunrays.

"It looks hotter than the horns of Eblis!" said Cunningham.

"The horns of Eblis, sahib, are what we leave behind us. They grow hot now! Thy countrymen, the men who hated thee so easily, heated them, and sit now between them for their folly!"

"How d'you mean? 'Pon my soul and honor, Rissaldar, you talk more riddles in five minutes than I ever heard before in all my life!"

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"There be many riddles I have not told yet—riddles of which I do not know the answer. Read me this one. Why did the British Government annex the State of Oudh? All of the best native soldiers came from Oudh, or nearly all. They were loyal once; but can a man be fairly asked to side against his own? If Oudh should rise in rebellion, what would the soldiers do?"

"Dunno, I'm sure," said Cunningham.

"Read me this one, then. By pacifying both Mohammedan and Hindu, and by letting both keep their religion, by sometimes playing one against the other, and by being just, the British Government has become supreme from the Himalayas to the ocean. Can you tell me why they now issue cartridges for the new rifles that are soaked in the fat of cows and pigs, thus insulting both Hindu and Mohammedan?"

"I didn't know it was so."

"Sahib, it is! These new cartridges, and this new drill—— Sahib, I, I, who am loyal to the marrow of my bones, would no more touch those cartridges, nor bite them, as the drill decrees, than I would betray thee! Pig's fat! Ugh!"

He spat with Mohammedan eloquence and wiped his lips on his tunic sleeve before resuming.

"Then, like a flint and steel, to light the train that they have laid, they loose these missionaries in a swarm from one end of India to the other. Why? What say one and all? Mohammedan and Hindu both say it is a plot, first to make them lose their own religion by defilement, then to make Christians of them! Foolishness to talk thus? Nay! It was foolishness to act thus!

"Sahib, peace follows in the wake of soldiers, as we know. Time and time again, the peace of India has been ripped asunder at the whim of priests! These padre people, preaching new damnation everywhere, are the flint and steel for the tinder of the cartridge fat!"

"I never knew you to croak before, Mohammed Gunga."

"Nor am I croaking. I am but praising Allah, Who has sent thee now to the place whence the wind will come to fan the hell flames that presently will burn. The wind will blow hot or cold, for or against the Government, according as you and I and certain others act when opportunity arrives! See yonder!"

They had been seen, evidently, for horsemen, looking like black ants on the desert, seemed to have crawled from the bowels of the living rock, and were galloping in their direction.

"Friends?" asked Cunningham.

"Friends indeed! But they have yet to discover whether we are friends. They set me thinking, sahib. Alwa is well known on this countryside, and none dare raid his place; few would waste time trying. Therefore it is all one to him who passes along this road, and he takes no trouble as a rule to send his men out in skirmishing order when a party comes in view. Why, then, does he trouble now?"

"Couldn't say. I don't know Alwa."

"I am thinking, sahib, that the cloud has burst at last. A blood-red cloud! Alwa is neither scaremonger nor robber; when he sends out armed men to inspect strangers on the skyline, there is war! Sahib, I grow young again.

"Had people listened to me, had they called me anything but fool when I warned them, thou and I would have been cooped up now in Agra, or in Delhi, or Lucknow, or Peshawur. Now we are free on the plains of Rajputana, within a ride of fifty of my blood relations, and they each within reach of others!

"Ho, I can hear the thunder of a squadron at my back again! I am young, sahib—young! My old joints loosen! Allah send the cloud *has* burst at last! I bring to two thousand Rangars a new Cunnigan Bahadur! Thy father's son shall learn what Cunnigan Bahadur taught!"

HE LAPSED into silence, watching the advancing horsemen, who swooped down on them in an ever-closing fan formation. His tired horse sensed the thrill that tingled through its rider's veins, and pranced again, curving his neck and straining at the bit until Mohammed Gunga steadied him. The five behind—even the mule drivers too—detected excitement in the air, and the little column closed in on its leaders. All eyes watched the neck-and-neck approach of Alwa's men, until Cunningham at last could see their turbans and make out that they were Rangars, not Hindus. Then he and the Rissaldar drew rein.

There were twenty who raced toward them, but no Alwa.

"It is as I thought!" declared Mohammed

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Gunga. "It is war, sahib! He has summoned men from his estates. As a rule he can afford but ten men for that fort of his, and he would not send *all* his men to meet us; he has a garrison up yonder!"

Like blown dust devils, the twenty raced to them, and drew up thundering within a lance length. A sword-armed Rangar with a little gold lace on his sleeve laughed loud as he saluted, greeting Mohammed Gunga first. The Rissaldar accepted his salute with iron dignity.

"Forgive him, sahib!" he whispered to Cunningham. "The *jungli* knows no better! He will learn whom to salute first when Alwa has said his say!"

But Cunningham was in no mood just then to stand on military ceremony or right of precedence. He was too excited, too inquisitive, too occupied with the necessity for keeping calm in the face of what most surely looked like the beginning of big happenings. These horsemen of Alwa's rode, and looked, and laughed like soldiers newstripped of the hobble ropes of peace, and their very seat in the untanned saddles—tight down, loose swaying from the hips, and free—was confirmation of Mohammed Gunga's words.

They wheeled in a cloud, and led the way, opening a little in the center to let the clouds of sand their horses kicked up blow to the right and left of Cunningham and his men. Not a word was spoken, not a question asked, nor a piece of news exchanged, until the whole party halted at the foot of Alwa's fortress home, a great iron gate in front of them, and garden land on each side, watered by the splashing streamlet from the heights above.

"Men of the house of Kachwaha have owned and held this place, sahib, since Allah made it!" whispered Mohammed Gunga. "Men say that Alwa has no right to it. They lie! His father's father won the dower right!"

He was interrupted by the rising of the iron gate. It seemed solid, without even an eyehole in it. It was wide enough to let four horses under side by side, and for all its weight it rose as suddenly and evenly as if a giant's hand had lifted it. Immediately behind it, like an actor waiting for the stage curtain to rise, Alwa bestrode his war horse in the middle of a roadway. He saluted with drawn saber, and this time Cunningham replied.

Almost instantly the man who had led the gallopers and had saluted Mohammed Gunga, spurred his horse up close to Cunningham and whispered: "Pardon, sahib! I did not know! Am I forgiven?"

"Yes," said Cunningham, remembering then that a Rajput, and a Rangar more particularly, thinks about points of etiquette before considering what to eat. Alwa growled out a welcome, rammed his saber home, and wheeled without another word, showing the way at a walk—which was all a wild goat could have accomplished—up a winding road hewn out of the solid mountain, that corkscrewed 'round and 'round upon itself until it gave on to the battlemented summit. There he dismounted, ordered his men to their quarters, and for the first time took notice of his cousin.

"I have thy missionary and his daughter, three horses for thee, and thy man," he smiled.

"Did Ali Partab bring them?"

"Nay. It was I brought Ali Partab and the rest! My promise is redeemed!"

Mohammed Gunga thrust out his sword hilt and smiled back at him. "I present Raff Cunnigan sahib, son of Pukka Cunnigan Bahadur!" he announced.

Alwa drew himself up to his full height, and eyed young Cunningham as a buyer eyes a war-horse, inch by inch. The youngster, who had long since learned actually to revel in the weird sensation of a hundred pairs of eyes all fixed on him at once, felt this one man's gaze go over him as if he were being probed. He thanked his God he had no fat to be detected, and that his legs were straight, and that his tunic fitted him!

"*Salaam, Bahadur*," said Alwa slowly. "I knew thy father. So—thou—art—his—son. Welcome. There is room here always for a guest. I have other guests with whom you might care to speak. I will have a room made ready. Have I leave to ask questions of my cousin here?"

Cunningham bowed in recognition of his courtesy, and walked away to a point whence he could look from the beetling parapet away and away across the desert, that shone hot and hazy-rimmed on every side. If this were a man on whom he must depend for following, if any of all the more-than-hints dropped by the Rissaldar were true, it seemed to him that his reception was a little too chilly to be hopeful.

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AFTER a minute or two he turned his eyes away from the dazzling plain below, and faced about to inspect the paved courtyard. Around it, on three sides of a parallelogram, there ran a beautifully designed and wonderfully worked-out veranda-fronted building, broken here and there by cobbled passages that evidently led to other buildings on the far edge of the rock. In the center, covered by a roof like a temple dome in miniature, was the ice-cold spring whose existence made the fort tenable. Under the veranda, on a long, low lounge, was a sight that arrested his attention, held him spellbound, drew him, tingling in a way he could not have explained, drew him, drew him, slow-footed, awkward, red, across the courtyard.

He heard Mohammed Gunga swear aloud; he recognized the wording of the belly-growled Rangar oath; but it did not occur to him that what he saw—what was drawing him—could be connected with it. He looked straight ahead, and walked ahead, reached the edge of the veranda, took off his helmet, and stood still, feeling like an idiot, with the sun full on his head.

"I'd advise you to step into the shade," said a voice that laughed more sweetly than the chuckling spring. "I don't know who you are, but I'm more glad to see you than I ever was in my life to see anybody. I can't get up, because I'm too stiff; the ride to here from Howrah City all but killed me, and I'm only here still because I couldn't ride another yard. My father will be out in a moment. He's half dead too."

"My name is Cunningham."

"I'm Miss McClean. My father *was* a missionary in Howrah."

She nodded to a chair beside her, and Cunningham took it, feeling awkward, as men of his type usually do when they meet a woman in a strange place.

"How in the world did you get in?" she asked him. "It's two days now since the Alwa sahib told us that the whole country is in rebellion. How is it that you managed to reach here? According to Alwa, no white man's life is safe in the open, and he only told me to-day that he wouldn't let me go away even if I were well enough to ride."

"First I've heard of the rebellion!" said Cunningham, aghast at the notion of hearing news like that at second hand, and from a woman.

"Hasn't Alwa told you?"

"No. Still, he hasn't had time to, yet."

"Then you'd better ask him. If what he says is true—and I think he tells the truth—the natives mean to kill us all, or drive us out of India. He has been more than kind, more than hospitable, more than chivalrous. Just because he gave his word to another Rangar, he risked his life about a dozen times in order to get my father and me and Ali Partab out of Howrah.

"But I don't think he quite liked doing it; and—this is in confidence—if I were asked—and speaking just from intuition—I should say he is really in sympathy with the rebellion!"

"How long have you been here?" asked Cunningham.

"Several days—ten, I think. It seemed strange at first, and rather awful, to be lodged on such a rock in a section of a Rangar's harem! Yes, there are several women behind the scenes, though I'm not allowed to see them. I've not thought about much except the awful news. Imagine, Mr. Cunningham, what it must mean, supposing it is true."

"Who was the Rangar to whom Alwa gave his word? Not Mohammed Gunga by any chance?"

"Yes, Mohammed Gunga."

"Well, I'm——" Cunningham clipped off the participle just in time. "There's something more than talk about rebellion, then if he said it! That man's been talking in riddles to me ever since I came to India, and it begins to look as if he knew long in advance."

He was about to cross-examine Miss McClean rigorously, even at the risk of seeming either rude or frightened; but before his lips could frame another question he caught sight of Mohammed Gunga making signals to him. He affected to ignore the signals. He objected to being kept in the dark so utterly, and wished to find out a little for himself before listening to what the Rangars had to say. But Mohammed Gunga started over to him.

He could not hear the remark Mohammed Gunga made to Alwa over his shoulder as he came:

"Had I remembered there was a woman of his own race here, I would have plunged him straight into the fighting! Now, there will be the devil first to pay!"

"He has decision in at least one thing!" grinned Alwa.

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"Something that I think thou lackest, cousin!" came the hot retort.

Alwa turned his back, with a shake of his head and a thin-lipped smile; then disappeared through a green door in the side of what seemed like solid rock. A moment later, Mohammed Gunga stood near Cunningham, saluting.

"We ask the favor of a consultation, sahib."

Cunningham rose, a shade regretfully, and followed into the rock-walled cavern into which Alwa had preceded them. It was nearly square—a hollow bubble in the age-old lava, ax-trimmed many hundred years ago. What light there was came in through three long slits, that gave an archer's view of the plain and of the zigzag roadway from the iron gate below. It was cool, for the rock roof was fifty or more feet thick, and the silence of it seemed like the nestling-place of peace.

They sat down on wooden benches around the walls, with their soldier legs stretched out in front of them. Alwa broke silence first, and it was of anything but peace he spoke.

"Now—now, let us see whose throats we are to slit!" he started cheerfully.

CHAPTER XXIV

Achilles had a tender spot
That even guarding gods forgot
When clothing him in armor;
And I have proved this charge o' mine
For fear, and sloth, and vice, and wine,
But clean forgot the charmer!

T. M.

THE Alwa sahib knew more English than he was willing to admit. In the first place, he had the perfectly natural dislike of committing his thoughts to any language other than his own when anything serious was the subject of discussion; in the second place, he had little of Mohammed Gunga's last-ditch loyalty. Not that Alwa could be disloyal; he had not got it in him; but as yet he had seen no good reason for pledging himself and his to the British cause.

So, for more than ten minutes he chose to sit in apparent dudgeon, his hands folded in front of him on the hilt of his tremendous saber, growling out a monologue in his own language for Mohammed Gunga's benefit. Then Mohammed Gunga silenced him with an uplifted hand, and turned to translate to Cunningham.

"It would seem, sahib, that even while we rode to Abu the rebellion was already raging! It burst suddenly. They have mutinied at Berhampur and slain their officers. Likewise at Meerut, and at all the places in between. At Kohat, in this Province, they have slain every white man, woman and child, and also at Arjpur and Sohlat. The rebels are hurrying to Delhi, where they have proclaimed a new rule, under the descendants of the old-time kings. Word of all this came before dawn today, by a messenger from Maharaja Howrah, to my cousin here. My cousin stands pledged to uphold Howrah on his throne. Howrah is against the British. Jaimihr, his brother, is in arms against Howrah."

"Why did the Alwa sahib pledge himself to Howrah's cause?"

Mohammed Gunga—who knew quite well—saw fit to translate the question. With a little sign of irritation Alwa growled his answer.

"He says, sahib, that for the safety of two Christian missionaries, for whom he has no esteem at all, he was forced to swear allegiance to a Hindu whom he esteems even less. He says that his word is given!"

"Does he mean that he would like me and the missionaries to leave his home at once? Do we embarass him?"

Again Mohammed Gunga—this time with a grin—saw fit to ask before he answered.

"He says, 'God forbid,' sahib; 'a guest is a guest!' "

Cunningham reflected for a moment; then leaned forward.

"Tell him this!" he said slowly. "I am glad to be his guest, but, if this story of rebellion is true——"

"It is true, sahib! More than true! There is much more to be told!"

"Then I can only accept his hospitality as the representative of my Government! I stay here officially, or not at all. It is for him to answer!"

"Now, Allah be praised!" swore Mohammed Gunga. "I knew we had a man! That is well said, sahib!"

"The son of Cunnigan Bahadur is welcome here on any terms at all!" growled Alwa, when Mohammed Gunga had translated. "All the rebels in all India, all trying at once, would fail to take this fort of mine, had I a larger garrison. But what Rangar on this countryside will risk his life and

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estates on behalf of a cause that is already lost? If they come to hold my fort for me, the rebels will burn their houses. The British *raj* is doomed. We Rangars have to play for our own stake!"

Then Mohammed Gunga rose, and paced the floor like a man in armor, tugging at his beard and kicking at his scabbard each time that he turned at either end.

"What Rangar in this Province would have had one yard of land to his name but for this man's father?" he demanded. "In his day we fought, all of us, for what was right! We threw our weight behind him when he led, letting everything except obedience go where the devil wanted it! What came of that? Good titles, good report, good feeling, peace!"

"And then, the *zemindar* laws!" growled Alwa. "Then the laws that took away from us full two-thirds of our revenue!"

"We had had no revenue, except for Cunnigan Bahadur!"

When the substance of the argument had been duly translated, it dawned on Cunningham exactly why and how he came to be there! He understood, now, that Mohammed Gunga had told nothing less than truth when he declared it had been through his scheming, and no other man's, that he, Cunningham, whose sole thought was to be a soldier, had been relegated to oblivion and politics! He understood why Byng had signed the transfer, and he knew, knew, knew deep down inside him that his chance had come!

"IT SEEMS that another Cunningham is to have the honor of preserving Rangars' titles for them," he smiled. "How many horsemen could the Alwa sahib raise?"

"That would depend!" Alwa was in no mood to commit himself.

"At the most—at a pinch—in case of direct need, and for a cause that all agreed on?"

"Two thousand."

"Horsed and armed?"

"And ready!"

"And you, Alwa sahib; are you pledged to fight against the British?"

"Not in so many words. I swore to uphold Howrah on his throne. He is against the British."

"You swore to help smash his brother, Jaimihr?"

"I swore to help if I were needed."

"And Jaimihr, too, is against the British?"

"Jaimihr is for Jaimihr, and has a personal affair with me!"

"I must think," said Cunningham, getting up. "I can think better alone. D'you mind if I go outside for a while, and come back later to tell you what I think?"

Alwa arose and held the door open for him; stood and watched him across the courtyard; then turned and laughed at Mohammed Gunga.

"Straight over to the woman!" he grinned. "This leader of thine seems in leading-strings himself already!"

Mohammed Gunga cursed, and cursed again as his own eyes confirmed what Alwa said.

"I tried him all the ways there are, except that one way," he declared. "May Allah forgive my oversight! I should have got him well entangled with a woman before he reached Peshawur. He should have been heart-broken by this time; rightly, he should have been desperate with unrequited love. Byng Bahadur could have managed it. Byng Bahadur *would* have managed it, had I thought to advise him."

He stood, looking over very gloomily at Cunningham, making a dozen wild plans for getting rid of Miss McClean—by no means forgetting poison, and the height of Alwa's aerie from the plain below! He would have been considerably calmer, could he have heard what Cunningham and Miss McClean were saying.

The missionary was with her now, ill and exhausted from the combined effects of excitement, horror, and the unaccustomed ride across the desert, most anxious for his daughter, worried, to the verge of desperation, by the ghastly news of the Rebellion.

"Mr. Cunningham, I hope you are the forerunner of a British force?" he hazarded.

But Cunningham was too intent on cross-examination to waste time on giving any information.

"I want you to tell me, quite quietly and without hurry, all you can about Howrah," he said, sitting close to Miss McClean. "I want you to understand that I am the sole representative of my Government in the whole district, and that whatever can be done depends very largely on what information I can get. I have been talking to the

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Alwa sahib, but he seems too obsessed with his own predicament to be able to make things quite clear. Now, go ahead and tell me what you know about conditions in the city. Remember, you are under orders! Try and consider yourself a scout, reporting information to your officer. Try to forget your horror, and your murdered countrymen. Tell me every single thing, however unimportant."

On the far side of the courtyard, Alwa and Mohammed Gunga had gone to lean over the parapet and watch something that seemed to interest both of them intently. There were twenty or more men, lined around the ramparts on the lookout, and they all, too, seemed spellbound, but Cunningham was too engrossed in Miss McClean's story of the happenings in Howrah City to take notice.

Now and then, her father would help her out with an interjected comment. Occasionally Cunningham would stop her with a question, or would ask her to repeat some item. But for more than an hour she spun a clear-strung narrative that left very little to imagination and included practically all there was to know.

"Do you think," asked Cunningham, "that this brute Jaimihr really wants to make you Maharanee?"

"I couldn't say," she shuddered. "You know, there have been several instances of European women having practically sold themselves to native Princes; there have been stories—I have heard them—of English women marrying Rajas, and regretting it. There is no reason why he should not be in earnest, and he certainly seemed to be."

"And this treasure? Of course, I have heard tales about it, but I thought they were mere tales."

"That treasure is really there, and its amount must be fabulous. I have been told that there are jewels there which would bring a Raja's ransom, and gold enough to offset the taxes of the whole of India for a year or two.

"I've no doubt the stories are exaggerated, but the treasure is real enough, and big enough to make the throne worth fighting for. Jaimihr counts on being able to break the power of the priests and broach the treasure."

"And Jaimihr is—er—in love with you?"

"He tried very hard to prove it, in his own objectionable way!"

"And Jaimihr wants the throne—and Howrah wants to send a force against the British, but dare not move because of Jaimihr. I have Mohammed Gunga and five or six men to depend on. The Rangars are sitting on the fence. And the Government has its hands full. The lookout's bright! I think I see the way through."

"You are forgetting me."

The missionary spread his broad, stooped shoulders.

"I am a missionary first, but next to that I have my country's cause more at heart than anything. I place myself under your orders, Mr. Cunningham."

"I too," said Miss McClean.

She was looking at him keenly as he gazed away into nothing through slightly narrowed eyes. Vaguely his attitude reminded her of a picture she had once seen of the Duke of Wellington. There was the same mastery, the same far vision, the same poise of self-contained power.

His nose was not like the Iron Duke's, for young Cunningham's had rather more tolerance in its outline and less of Roman overbearing; but the eyes, and the mouth, and the angle of the jaw were so like Wellesley's as to force a smile.

"A woman isn't likely to be much use in a case like this—but one never knows," she said. "If I can help avenge those little murdered children——"

"Thanks," he answered quietly.

And as he turned his head to flash one glance at each of them, she recognized what Mohammed Gunga had gloated over from the first—the grim decision that will sacrifice all, take full responsibility, and use all means available for the one unflinching purpose of the game in hand. She knew that minute, and her father knew, that if she could be used—in any way at all—he would make use of her.

"Go ahead!" she nodded. "I'll obey!"

"And I will not prevent!" said Duncan McClean, straightening his spectacles. He too had been trying to blot from his mind the butchery he could not help imagining.

CUNNINGHAM left them and walked over to the parapet, where the whole garrison was bending excitedly now above the battlement. There were more than forty men, most of them clustered near Alwa and Mohammed Gunga. Mohammed Gunga was busy counting.

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"Eight hundred!" he exclaimed, as Cunningham drew near.

"Eight hundred what?"

"Come and see, sahib."

Cunningham leaned over and beheld a mounted column, trailing along the desert road in wonderfully good formation.

"Where are they from?" he asked.

"Jaimihr's men, from Howrah!"

"That means," growled Alwa, "that the Hindu pig Jaimihr has more than half the city at his back. He has left behind ten men for every one he brings with him—sufficient to hold his brother in check. Otherwise he would never have dared come here. He hopes to settle his little private quarrel with me first, before dealing with his brother! Who told him, I wonder, that I was pledged to Howrah?"

"He reckons he has caught thee napping in this fort of thine!" laughed Mohammed Gunga. "He means to bottle up the Rangars' leader, and so checkmate all of them."

The eight hundred horsemen on the plain below rode carelessly through Alwa's gardens, leaving trampled confusion in their wake, and lined up, with Jaimihr at their head, immediately before the great iron gate. A moment later four men rode closer, and hammered on it with their lance ends.

"Go down and speak to them!" commanded Alwa, and a man dropped down the zigzag roadway like a goat, taking short cuts from level to level, until he stood on a pinnacle of rock that overhung the gate. Ten minutes later he returned, breathing hard with the effort of his climb.

"Jaimihr demands the missionaries, particularly the Miss sahib; also quarters and food," he reported.

"Quarters and food he shall have!" swore Alwa, looking down at the Prince, who sat his charger in the center of the roadway. "Did he deign a threat?"

"He said that in fifteen minutes he will burst the gate in, unless he is first admitted!"

Duncan McClean walked over, limping painfully, and peered over the precipice.

"Unfriendly?" he asked, and Mohammed Gunga heard him.

"Thy friend Jaimihr, sahib! His teeth are all but visble from here!"

"And——?"

"He demands admittance; also thee and thy daughter!"

"And——?"

"Sahib—art thou a priest?"

"I am."

"One, then, who prays?"

"Yes."

"For dead men ever? For the dying?"

"Certainly."

"Aloud?"

"On occasion, yes."

"Then pray now! There will be many dead and dying on the plain below in less than fifteen minutes! Hindus, for all I know, would benefit by prayer. They have too many gods, and their gods are too busy fighting for ascendency to listen. Pray thou a little!"

There came a long shout from the plain, and Alwa sent a man again to listen. He came back with a message that Jaimihr granted amnesty to all who would surrender and that he would be pleased to accept Alwa's allegiance if offered to him.

"I will offer the braggart something in the way of board and lodging that will astonish him," growled Alwa. "Eight men to horse! The first eight. That will do. Back to the battlement the rest of you!"

They had raced for the right to loose themselves against eight hundred!

CHAPTER XXV

Now, give me all attention, for I'd have you understand
That I'm sick of silly argument, and tired of empty talk.
I have been and gone and done it! I've experimented, and
I've a devil in my bottle, but I da'sn't pull the cork!
T. M.

ALWA ordered ten men down into the bowels of the rock itself, where great wheels with a chain attached to them were forced around to lift the gate. Next he stationed a signaler, with a cord in each hand, above the parapet, to notify the men below exactly when to set the simple machinery in motion. His eight clattered out from the stables on the far side of the rock, and his own charger was brought to him saddled.

Then in a second it was evident why Rajputs do not rule in Rajputana.

"I ride too, with my men," declared Mohammed Gunga.

"Nay. This is my affair, my private quarrel with Jaimihr!"

Mohammed Gunga turned to Ali Partab,

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who had been a shadow to him ever since he came.

"Turn out my five and bring my charger," he commanded.

"No, I say!"

Alwa had his hand already on his saber hilt. "There is room for eight and no more. Four following four abreast and one ahead to lead them. I and my men know how to do this. I and my men have a personal dispute with Jaimihr. Stay thou here!"

Mohammed Gunga's five came clattering out so fast as to lead to the suspicion that their horses had been already saddled. Mohammed Gunga mounted.

"Lead on, cousin!" he exclaimed. "I will follow thy lead, but I come."

Then Alwa did what a native nearly always will do. He turned to a man not of his own race, whom he believed he could trust to be impartial.

"Sahib, have I no rights in my own house?"

"Certainly you have," said Cunningham, who was wondering more than anything what weird, wild trick these horsemen meant to play. No man in his senses would have dared to ride a horse at more than foot pace down the path. Was there another path? he wondered. At least, if eight men were about to charge into eight hundred, it would be best to keep his good friend Mohammed Gunga out of it, he decided.

"Rissaldar!" said Cunningham, turning to Mohammed Gunga.

The veteran was always most amenable to reason when addressed by his military title.

"Who of us two is senior, thou or I?"

"By Allah, not I, sahib. I am thy servant."

"I accept your service, and I order you to stay with your men up here with me."

Mohammed Gunga saluted and dismounted, and his five followed suit, looking as disappointed as children just deprived of a vacation. Alwa wheeled his horse in front of Cunningham and saluted too.

"For that service, sahib, I am thy friend!" he muttered. "That was right and reasonable, and a judgment quickly given. Thy friend, Bahadur!"

He spoke low on purpose, but Mohammed Gunga heard him, caught Cunningham's eye, and grinned.

"That was a trick well turned, sahib!" he whispered, snatching the opportunity to save his own face. "Alwa will listen in future when Cunnigan Bahadur speaks!"

"Go down and tell him that I come in person!" ordered Alwa, and the man dropped down the cliffside for the third time. They could hear his voice, high-pitched, resounding off the rock, and they caught a faint murmur of the answer. Below, Jaimihr could be seen waiting patiently, checking his restive war horse with a long-cheeked bit and waiting ready to charge with his following under the gate the moment it was opened. There were men not far from him ready to jam props in and keep the gate from closing down again. Rosemary McClean came over. She and Cunningham and the missionary leaned together over the battlement and watched.

"We might do some execution with rifles from here," Cunningham suggested. "I believe I'll send for mine."

But Mohammed Gunga overheard him.

"Nay, sahib! No shooting will be necessary. Watch!"

There was a clatter of hoofs. They were just in time to see the tails of the last four chargers disappearing around the corner downward. They had gone full pelt down a path that a hurried goat might hesitate to take! From where they stood there was an archer's view of every inch of the only rock-hewn road that led from the gate to the summit of the cliff. Any enemy who had burst in the gate would have had to climb in the teeth of a searching hail of missiles, with little chance of shooting back.

They could see the gate itself, and Jaimihr on the other side. And swooping, shooting, sliding down the trail like a storm-loosed avalanche, they could see the nine go, led by Alwa. No living creature could have looked away!

Below, entirely unconscious of the coming shock, the mounted sepoys waited behind Jaimihr in four long, straight lines. Jaimihr himself, with a heavy-hilted simitar held upward at the "carry," was about four chargers' lengths beyond the iron screen, ready to spur through. And full tilt down the gorge, steel-tipped, like a sunlit thunderbolt, gray-turbaned, reckless, whirling death ripped down on them!

THEY caught sound of the hammering hoofs too late. Two gongs boomed in the rock. The windlass creaked. Five seconds too late Jaimihr gathered up his reins, spurred, wheeled and

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shouted to the men behind him. The great gate rose like the jaws of a hungry monster, and the nine, streaking too fast down far too steep a slide to stop themselves, burst straight out under it and struck as a wind-blast smites a poppy field.

Jaimihr was borne backward, carried off his horse. Alwa and the first four rode him down and crashed through the four-deep line beyond. The second four pounced on him, gathered him and followed. Before the lines could form again the whole nine wheeled as a wind eddy spins on its own axis and burst through back again, the horses racing neck and neck, and the sabers cutting down a swath to screech and swear and gurgle in among the trampled garden stuff.

They came back in a line, all eight abreast, with Alwa leading by only a length. At the opening, four horses, two on each side, slid, rump to the ground, until their noses touched the rock walls.

Alwa and four dashed through and under; the rest recovered, spun on their haunches, and followed. The gongs boomed again down in the rock's belly, and the gate clanged shut.

"That was good," said Mohammed Gunga quietly. "Now watch again!"

Almost before the words had left his lips a hail of lead barked out from twenty vantage points, and the smoke showed where some forty men were squinting down steel barrels, shooting as rapidly and as rottenly as natives of India usually do. They did little execution, but before Alwa and his eight had climbed up the steep track to the summit, patting their horses' necks and reviling Jaimihr as they came, the cavalry below had scampered out of range, leaving their dead and wounded where they lay.

"How is that for a start, sahib?" demanded Mohammed Gunga exultantly, as two men deposited the disgruntled Jaimihr on his feet, and the Prince glared around him like a man awaking from a bad dream to encounter a worse actuality.

"How is that for a beginning?"

"As bad as could be!" answered Cunningham. "It was well executed, bold, clever, anything you like, Mohammed Gunga, but if I'd been asked I'd have sooner made the devil prisoner! Jaimihr is no use at all to us in here. Outside, he'd be a veritable godsend!"

CHAPTER XXVI

Another chivalry they sing,
To other gods they pray,
But all they risk, and all they bring;
Can ye do less than they?

T. M.

THE Jaimihr sahib stood and glared about him, eying the cold spring thirstily. His jeweled pugree was awry, and his clothing torn; the men who had seized him had dragged him by it from the saddle and had drawn him between them afterwards backward by the arms until the great gate clanged and they had dared stop to lift him up on horseback.

But with twisted, strained muscles, tired, disheveled, worsted, he still did not lack dignity. One of Alwa's men brought him a tin dipperful of water, after rinsing out the dipper thoroughly and ostentatiously. But Jaimihr smiled. His caste forbade. He waved away the offering much as Cæsar may have waved aside a crown, with an air of condescending mightiness too proud to know contempt.

"Go help thyself!" growled Alwa.

And Jaimihr walked slowly to the spring, knelt down, and dipped up water with his hand.

"Now to a cell with him!" commanded Alwa, as the Prince retraced his steps. Rosemary McClean took a step to hide herself behind Cunningham's broad shoulders, but Jaimihr saw her, and his proud smile broadened to a grin. He stopped and gazed at her, looked once from her to Cunningham, at whom he snarled; then met her eyes again.

"I slew a man once to save thee, pretty one!" he mocked. "Why slink away?"

Then he turned on Alwa, folding his arms and holding up his chin.

"I am ready," he said calmly.

Alwa, wiping blood from his long blade (out of Miss McClean's sight, as he imagined; she was setting her teeth hard and looking in the opposite direction), declined to meet Jaimihr's eyes.

"To the cell!" Alwa ordered gruffly.

Two men closed in, a third man strode behind, and in about a minute a heavy wooden door slammed on one of the numberless volcanic chasms that had been shaped out into living-places and fronted by the long veranda. At the sound, as if a load were off his mind, Alwa looked relieved

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and walked to the battlement, where he gazed for a few minutes at the cavalry below. Their leaders could be made out arguing, and they were certainly discussing the feasibility of storming Alwa's rock.

But it needed no warrior, it needed less even than intelligence, to tell that so long as there were forty to defend it that rock could be held against two thousand. To take it was a job for engineers, artillery and blockade tactics. Presently half of the men rode off in the direction of Howrah City and the other half took up position where they could watch the one iron-guarded entrance out of range.

Alwa turned.

"We might resume our conference," he suggested with the courtly air of a man just risen from a chair. No one who had not seen him ride would have dreamed that he was fresh from snatching a prisoner at the bottom of a neck-breaking defile. Cunningham nodded and looked back to Miss McClean before he followed.

"I HOPE to resume ours too, afterwards," he said, eying her as if he would have liked to test her temper there and then. She experienced the weird sensation of being read right through.

Like the Rajputs, Cunningham seemed little interested in her father. He turned the broad of his back on both of them and strode after Alwa and Mohammed Gunga deliberately, with strides of even length, with his chin held level and his eyes fixed straight ahead.

"That very young man is an old man!" said Rosemary McClean. "He's a grown man! Look at the set of those amazing shoulders!"

Her father smiled and wiped his spectacles.

"I think he's all we have between us and disaster," he answered. "Perhaps it's as well to begin by admiring him."

"I'm not admiring him," said Rosemary. "I'm wondering at him. I'm wondering at his strength—of mind, not muscle. I suppose any one of those Rajputs is stronger than he physically, though they don't look it."

"Bismillah!" swore Alwa, when the teak door shut on Cunningham. "We have made a good beginning. With Jaimihr locked up in a cell, Howrah need have little trouble for his throne. There will be no need to ride to a Hindu Raja's aid, praise Allah!"

"Alwa sahib!"

Cunningham fixed Alwa with his calm gray eyes, and Mohammed Gunga sat down on the bench contented. He could wait for what was coming now; he recognized the blossoming of the plant that he had nursed through its growth so long.

"I listen."

"I represent the British Government. Do you realize that?"

"Yes, sahib."

"I have no orders which entitle me to deal with a crisis such as this; but on behalf of my Government I assume full authority until I get in touch with some one senior to me. Is all that clear to you?"

"Most certainly, Huzoor."

"Will you listen to me on that understanding?"

"Surely, Bahadur. I am listening."

"You can raise two thousand men?"

"Perhaps."

"Say fifteen hundred?"

"Surely fifteen hundred. Not a saber less!"

"Will you raise them?"

"I must, sahib. Jaimihr's thousands will be here within a day or two, to tear me down from this nest of mine."

"I offer you and any men you raise absolute protection at your rear, if you will follow me and help put down this rebellion."

"But Howrah, sahib! I am pledged——"

"I was speaking."

"Pardon, Bahadur."

"I guarantee that you shall keep the letter of your given word to Howrah. You shall uphold him on the throne, and shall do it first, before we make a move to the eastward. You shall have his leave in writing, if you wish, to consider your pledge redeemed, and it shall be properly redeemed —no playing with the letter of the pledge."

"But the plundering behind us, sahib! There will not be one Rangar holding left with a building on it, not a head of cattle, not a blade of corn! Every Hindu and many others in this Province are for the rebels. They will burn and loot and ravage!"

"I guarantee, as I told you, absolute protection at your rear, and repayment in full for every anna's worth of damage done."

"This is the word of a man whom Allah——"

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"This is the word of a Cunnigan!" swore Mohammed Gunga, rising just intime to check the half spoken insult.

"Aye, of a Cunnigan," mused Alwa, turning aide to think.

"Good, sahib! Rub it home!" hissed Mohammed Gunga in Cunningham's ear. The veteran's hand was trembling on his saber hilt as no action would have made it shake.

"You have given your sacred word to Howrah," Cunningham continued, "and you shall keep it. I give my word of honor now to you that what I have said is my side of a bargain that shall be kept. I promise you good fighting, honorable treatment, and the thanks of the British Government. Also payment for all concerned on the war scale for Irregulars."

Alwa paced the floor again, twisting the fingers of his right hand in his beard and scowling.

"Honor of a Rajput!" he exclaimed. "But this is strong man's talk! Who art thou, son of Cunnigan, to talk of miracles? India is on fire from end to end. Now, while we talk here, the British garrisons are fighting against odds, backs to the wall.

"A hundred million, for aught anybody knows, are up in arms. The roads are blocked. The bridges are destroyed. The biggest fools whom Allah ever smote to madness are in charge of things—and the boy says, 'Bargain with me, Alwa; I guarantee!'"

"I guarantee!" said Cunningham.

"I keep my given word first to the Maharaja?"

"I add my word to yours."

"Then, since I must raise the men for my own sake, and since I am free when my word is kept to Howrah; since, according to the bargain, protection of our farms is first to be secured, to my satisfaction; is that understood?"

"Certainly. I will accept your judgment. When the farms are safe, we ride."

"And since thou art a Cunnigan and look like one, and speak like one—by the blood of God——"

He held out his hand and Cunningham seized it in a grip of iron.

"Thy servant, Bahadur—and I fancy that the honor is all mine!"

"But—let us understand each other, Alwa sahib. You join under my leadership—under my command. You will obey?"

"Surely I will obey. I am no Hindu priest to argue and equivocate. I and mine are your men!"

"Then, Alwa sahib, as soon as it is dark enough to send anybody past the watch below there, will you send summonses to all the Rangars within reach?"

"I will, Bahadur."

"And—one other thing. I want Jaimihr released tonight."

MOHAMMED GUNGA leaped to his feet and slammed his scabbard ferrule on the stone. Alwa, mouth agape, stared blankly. Neither of them spoke.

"Jaimihr is the key to the position. He is nothing but a nuisance where he is; outside he can be made to help us."

"Am I dreaming or art thou, sahib?"

Alwa stood in front of him with fists clenched on his hips and legs apart, bewildered.

"Jaimihr to go free? Why, that Hindu pig is the source of all the trouble in the district!"

"We are neither of us dreaming, Alwa sahib. Jaimihr is the dreamer. Let him dream in Howrah City. Let him lead away his men and leave the road free for us to pass in and out. He will not return, for we will get together and be after him too quickly."

"But——"

"Oh, I know. He is your prisoner, and your honor is involved and all that kind of thing. I'm offering you much greater honor than you've ever experienced, and I've put my order in the shape of a request for courtesy's sake. I ask you again to let me deal with Jaimihr."

"It seems I was mad when I passed my word!" swore Alwa.

"I give you your word back again then."

"Bismillah! I refuse it!"

"Then I do with Jaimihr as I like?"

"I gave my word."

"Thanks. You'll be glad before we've finished. Now I've left the raising of fifteen hundred men to you, and you've promised?"

"Aye, and I will keep my promise."

"Very well. I'll hold another *confab* later. For the present I've another pair of possibles to talk over to our side."

"The men on this rock are my men and Mohammed Gunga's," answered Alwa

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nstantly. "Our word is their word. They need no talking to!"

"I know it. I mean the missionaries."

He laughed at the open-mouthed disgust which neither Alwa nor Mohammed Gunga took the least pains to conceal; took their salute, and walked straight across the yard to where McClean was seated by his daughter. He took a seat beside them and started soldier-wise on what he had to say without preliminaries.

"Can you act?" he asked. "Can either of you?"

He laughed again at the amazement both of them betrayed.

"Will you try to act?"

It was Rosemary who answered first. She seemed to know that this quiet youngster had a motive underlying everything he said, and that he would come quite directly to his object.

"We never did, either of us. I would try."

"I understood you to say, both of you, that you placed yourselves at my disposal. Before you confirm that, please accept my word for it that the situation's desperate, and that anything I could ask you to do to help would be extremely dangerous."

"I have nothing to take back," said the missionary.

"Nor have I," said his daughter.

"Have you considered carefully? I warn you, if you put yourselves under my authority, I shall use both of you to the limit, and expect my orders to be obeyed. I shall take full responsibility for the orders I give, but I won't have them questioned."

"I understand," said both of them at once.

"I shall send you back to Howrah."

They started, both of them, and met each other's eyes.

"I will go willingly," said McClean, "but my daughter——"

"I must send you both."

"Of course we'll go!" said Rosemary, watching his face intently. She could read him as easily as he had read her when he looked into her eyes beside the parapet. "May we know the details of the plan?"

"You'll have to know each one of them, and you'll have to act your parts without a single hitch. I shall rehearse you, of course. You're under no false impression, I suppose, as to Hindu respect for your cloth, Mr. McClean?"

"None whatever. I regret to say that after many months there was not a Hindu in the whole of Howrah, except perhaps Joanna, who did not implicitly believe in my roguery."

"Who is Joanna?"

"The old woman who waits on my daughter. She is about the buildings somewhere.

"Can you depend on her?"

"So far she has been more than wonderful; loyal to the core."

"Good. That'll very likely make things easier for you. She must go to Howrah too. Now you understand, and that's fortunate—I'd have hated to have to explain it!—that the Hindus believe you're a scoundrel who would stop at nothing. They believe that of all Christian clergymen. Jaimihr, our prisoner here, believes it. I want you to go to Jaimihr in his cell, and offer to bargain with him for your daughter!"

McClean nearly jumped from his seat.

"Keep calm!" said Cunningham. "There's worse to come."

"You must say—and he'll believe it—that you are hand in glove with all these Rangars, and that you are able to persuade them. He's seen how the Rangars risked their lives to carry you away, and he'll have no reason for doubting what you say.

"Tell him you know what a plight the British are in; that you know the British *raj* is doomed; and that all you want to do is to secure a good big load of loot and clear out of India for good. Tell him the Rangars will see you to the coast afterwards."

"But those would be a terrible lot of lies," said Duncan McClean, wiping his spectacles for the dozenth time.

"I am your conscience until this show is over!" said Cunningham. "I am responsible; I am stage director; and you will be playing a part, not lying."

"Well, I'm listening."

"YOU may tell him that I am a British officer who failed to show up at his post on the eve of the outbreak—a deserter, in fact. That is actually true. You may say that I am now leader of these Rangars and your friend. Both those statements will be true. Tell him that the Rangars will ride in and deal with his brother, the Maharaja.

"Be careful what word you use there; say 'deal with,' or 'tackle,' or 'attend to';

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be rather vague. Tell him, though, that he must be ready to strike for the throne the moment the Rangars show up. He must have all his men in readiness close to where the treasure is, so that we can snaffle that first and divide it before proceeding with the other business of the meeting.

"Fix some sum. Tell him you'll be satisfied with, say, ten thousand rupees in gold, or twenty thousand, and that I and the Rangars will expect a crore between the lot of us."

"But couldn't I tell him all this without the necessity for going into Howrah?"

"No. He's too deep for that. We've got to fool him. If you agree to go in there with your daughter, he'll believe you; otherwise he'll smell a rat. He's got to escape from here; you'll have to explain to him that the Rangars are hesitating, but that they'll see reason when they realize that he's at large. Tell him they're afraid of him.

"You must agree to follow him, and that's where the danger lies; but the risk isn't as serious as it looks. He'll argue that once he's got you in Howrah he's got you for good—or at least your daughter—and he won't be in any violent hurry.

"You'll have to make it clear to him—and stick to your point—that you don't trust him one bit. You'll have to tell him that you put this scheme up to the Rangars, to loot the secret treasure, and that they like you and will look to you for orders; you must make him believe that the treasure is all you're after.

"Refuse to let your daughter out of your sight until the money's in your grasp, and if he offers any violence, tell him that the Rangars won't fight for him without word from you. It's true, isn't it, that the priests are joint guardians of the treasure?"

"Quite true."

"Good. That means he'd be afraid to broach it, or to let his Hindu soldiers try. They're all afraid of the priests. But if he could blame it on the Rangars afterwards, he'd jump at the opportunity. He's as keen on that treasure, you may safely bet, as you've got to pretend to be.

"The point is to get yourself and Miss McClean close to the treasure, so that we can find it and you at once when we arrive. Make an appointment for dawn, and send what's her name—Joanna?—send Joanna to tell us the direction."

"But this is terrible! I imagine I am not what men would call a coward, but——"

Duncan McClean wiped his spectacles for the thirteenth time.

"It's this way. Unless we can pull this thing off, Alwa here is corked up. I not only can't lead any men to help put down the rebellion, but in the end you and your daughter are practically sure to find yourselves at Hindu mercy. Your action would free fifteen hundred men to fight for our side, and fifteen hundred—at a pinch like this would seem to be—will very likely make a world of difference."

"And you mean that unless I make a bargain for my daughter——"

"Unless you pretend to."

"Unless I pretend to bargain for my daughter you are helpless? It's an awful lot to ask a body!"

"I'm asking not one bit more of you than I've asked these Rangars. They have thrown their homes and wives and children—all—into the scale on my bare word, and they will be fighting for foreigners, not for their own as you will be."

"Is there no other way?"

"None that I can think of. You see, Alwa has promised to back up Howrah against Jaimihr, and he won't fall down on that. We've got to use cunning and help Alwa keep his word."

"But will I be making myself a party to the looting of this treasure?"

"No."

"But——"

"I give you my absolute promise on that point."

"Nothing but this string of lies, eh?"

"Call it diplomacy; you'll be serving your country in her hour of need."

He turned to his daughter.

"Are you afraid, dear?" he asked her.

"No. Of course I'm not afraid. Or, if I am, I'm going all the same. You're sure you'll come for us, Mr. Cunningham?"

"Unless I'm dead."

"In that case I suppose it's all up anyhow?"

"If my men suffer a serious reverse before we reach you, you're doomed."

"That's cheering!" said McClean. "Do I understand that these are orders, Mr. Cunningham, given on the strength of our promise to obey?"

"Yes. I am responsible for them."

"Aweel—aweel; an' did I promise to obey?"

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"I'm glad you see it in that light. I will ake care, if I live, that your conduct is eported in the right quarter."

"Thanks," said McClean smiling, and iping at his spectacles again. "I—ah—believe that the greatest favor you could ver do me would be to suppress the story bsolutely!

"Offering to sell my daughter; well—it sn't ethical, and for a man of my calling it —ah—well—you understand! When do you want me to see this villain Jaimihr? Understand me, I'm obeying orders—not acting on my own initiative!"

"Tonight," said Cunningham. "Thank you, Miss McClean."

"Mr. Cunningham—did you say you're a deserter?"

"Nominally, yes."

"Nominally? Oh! That means not really?" She was blushing. "I'm—I'm glad you're not one really."

And as he walked away to tell the details of his plan to Alwa and Mohammed Gunga, Cunningham was blushing too, though he could not have told himself the reason.

CHAPTER XXVII

The trapped wolf bared his fangs and swore:
"But set me this time free,
And I will hunt thee never more!
By ear and eye and jungle law,
I'll starve—I'll faint—I'll die before
I bury tooth in thee!"

T. M.

JAIDEV SINGH was a five-K man, with the hair, pants, bangle, comb and dagger that betoken him who has sworn the vow of Khanda ka Pahul. No single section of the Sikh ritual has been devised with other motive than to preserve the fighting character of their organization. The very name Singh means lion. The Sikh's long hair, with the iron rings hidden underneath, is intended as protection against sword cuts; and their faith, because it is more spiritual and less fanatical than most, makes first-class soldiers of them.

Jaidev Singh arrived some two hours after dusk. The notice of his coming was the steady drumming footfall of his horse, that slowed occasionally and responded to the spur again immediately. Below, close to the iron gate, there were some of Jaimihr's cavalry nosing about among the trampled gardens for the dead and wounded they had been forced to leave behind.

"One horse from the west," said Alwa. "The searchers below are in the moonlight; whoever he is can see them. If he is their man, he will ride first to their main body yonder. See—he is their man."

On a horse that staggered gamely, silhouetted in the yellow light, a man whose nationality or caste could not be recognized, rode straight for the bivouacking cavalry, and a swarm of them rode out at a walk to meet him.

"By Allah, he is not!" swore Alwa suddenly. "To the wheels! Quick—to the wheels! Ten men to horse!"

He took the cords himself to send the necessary signal down into the belly of the rock. From Alwa's stable, where it was obvious by this time that he kept men and horses ready day and night, ten troopers ambled out, and without another order dipped down the breakneck gorge to the gate below. The approaching rider had wheeled and was spurring like a madman to the spot where the men who searched were forming up to cut him off.

The ten rode down as quickly as they dared in the tricky moonlight, two men leading and the rest in fours behind. The cords were jerked, the gongs boomed out, the gate yawned, well oiled and silent—and the ten whirled out to take the searching party from behind. They drove them reeling into the pursuers, rammed the charge home, to throw the whole into shouting, blind confusion, eddied, and raced back again.

The new arrival reached the gate ahead of them, and his horse dropped dead beneath it; they seized him under the arms and bore him through; then shouted to delay the signal while they dragged the dead horse clear. But the signal was mistaken. The great gate, sharpened below into a knife edge, fell with a rush and cut the horse in halves.

One man took Jaidev Singh behind his saddle and deposited him panting in front of Alwa.

"Who are you?" demanded the owner of the rock, recognizing a warrior by his trademarks, and moderating the natural gruffness of his voice.

"Jaidev Singh, galloper to Byng Bahadur, Brigadier. I bring a letter for Mohammed Gunga sahib, or for Cunnigan sahib, whichever I can find first."

"They are both here."

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Cunningham was called, and the Sikh handed him a tiny folded piece of paper, stuck together at the edge with native gum. He tore it open and read its contents aloud to Mohammed Gunga, who had come hurrying across the courtyard. The note ran:

What are you two men doing? The worst has happened. We need men immediately, and I particularly need them. One hundred good troopers would be better this week than a thousand two weeks from now. Hurry, and send word by bearer.

S. F. Byng.

"How soon can you start back?" asked Cunningham.

"Now, sahib."

"Will you be good enough to feed him, Alwa sahib?"

"Food waits. He is a Sikh; he eats meat—meat is ready."

The Sikh—or at least the true Sikh—is not hampered by a list of caste restrictions; no law forbids him to accept the hospitality of soldiers of a different creed. The man fell to at curried beef that would have made a Hindu know himself as damned, and Cunningham—after punctiliously talking matters over with Alwa and Mohammed Gunga—wrote an answer. He wrote it in Greek characters, for fear the Sikh might fall into an ambush by the way:

Sir:—I will come with fifteen hundred just as fast as they can possibly be raised. Fifteen will come as readily as one, but there *have been* difficulties in the way. You may anticipate no recruits for the rebels from this district, but I don't think it possible to reach you in less than a week. I will not waste a minute. Your obedient servant,

Ralph Cunningham.

There was no sense, as he saw it, in worrying an already worried General with details of the difficulties to be overcome. It seemed to him better to hold out all the hope possible.

"WHERE is Byng Bahadur?" he asked, as the Sikh returned with native bread in his fist.

"At Deeseera, sahib; not shut in altogether, but hard pressed. He gave up the town and camped outside it, and with the few men he has he has been striking, not standing still. His Irregulars, sahib, were disbanded just before the outbreak, but some of them came back at word from him.

"He has two British regiments, some Goorkhas, some of my people, and some from the North—not many more than two thousand all told, having lost heavily in action. There is word being passed from mouth to mouth that many sahibs have been superseded, and that only real sahibs have commands now. Byng Bahadur is a real sahib.

"Is the answer ready? So—and is this horse for me? He is a wonder of a horse. *Salaam!*"

The man saluted, mounted, and rode off with two of Alwa's troopers just in front of him, to show him the way down. At the foot, while he raced to leave the angry Hindu cavalry behind, they dragged the half horse clear of the gate, and left it on the outside for the jackals.

"Now," said Alwa, flinging himself wholeheartedly like a gentleman into a plan that he mistrusted, but which he had promised to endeavor to put through, "for the wonderful escape, the clear road—and the recruiting!"

He had held out stoutly for an hour or two, when Cunningham had told him word for word about his conversation with the two McCleans.

"No, sahib!" he had argued. "When one has a prisoner who knows all of the woven intricacies of the enemy's plan, the right and only sensible course to take is to keep him in a cell until he talks."

"We'd never get a man like Jaimihr to tell us anything."

"No, sahib? There be ways and means!"

"I'd like to make one point clear before we go a yard further, Alwa sahib. I will not allow the torturing of prisoners under any circumstances."

"Not torture, sahib! Who said torture? I would deprive him of comforts. I would have the cell attendant forget, perhaps, to bring him water for a day or two."

"I would have you hanged from your own battlements, Alwa sahib, if I caught you doing anything like that!" Cunningham answered very quietly; and Mohammed Gunga laughed aloud.

"Waste no time guessing, cousin! I myself would hang thee, if he ordered it! There speaks a Cunnigan!"

And so, when the hoof beats of the departing Sikh had barely yet drummed down in the distance, Duncan McClean crept furtively to Jaimihr's cell, acting wonderfully well for a man whose creed and practise both entailed compliance with the

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rule of open honesty. A dozen watched him enter; Alwa and another listened at the door; but to the man inside it seemed as if a sending had been sent to him in answer to his prayers to each of a dozen different Hindu gods.

"Hsssh!" said McClean. "Speak low! I come to drive a bargain with you!"

"Who am I to bargain?" asked Jaimihr.

And the missionary—decent, mild-mannered, honest-living Scotsman that he was—proceeded there and then to make proposals that would have turned the hair, not only of his fellow countrymen and women, but of something like a third of the native population of India. Even in that land of curtained polygamy, there are men with ideals that do not include the selling of their daughters.

What hurt the missionary most was not the lies he had to tell, but the fact that the Prince believed them! He had striven all his time to lead a life which other men might take example from; he had tried to all the time in Howrah City. Yet the very first Hindu to whom he made dishonorable overtures accepted instantly and without argument the suggestion that he was worse than a blackmailer, worse than a thief or a murderer, worse than a liar; that he was that vilest of beings, a man who trafficked in his daughter's flesh!

But he stuck gamely to his guns. With all of the business shrewdness of a Scotsman, he drove the hardest bargain that he could, realizing that no better way could be found of convincing Jaimihr. He insisted on fifty thousand rupees as his own price, together with as many diamonds from the treasure chest as he could take up in one hand.

For Alwa he demanded a fixed income from the State, in return for the raising of a permanent Rangar garrison which should curb the power of the Hindu priests, once Jaimihr was Maharaja; and for each Rangar of the force that was to ride to Jaimihr's aid he bargained for the sum of five thousand rupees and one large diamond each.

He satisfied himself absolutely that he had impressed the Prince before he left the cell. He even went so far as to suggest a means for ridding himself of the Rangars afterwards, should the Prince find when he had reached the throne that the Mohammedans were overweening.

Moreover, Duncan made it very clear indeed that if the Prince expected to get any help from Alwa and his men, both McClean and his daughter would have to be free and unharmed when the Rangars arrived on the scene.

The Prince, appreciating that his visitor meant business, bargained his utmost too. McClean had to remind him again and again that he was still a prisoner, and would continue in confinement until he listened to reason. Jaimihr's principal anxiety, it seemed, was to get possession of the missionary's daughter before the arrival of the Rangars.

"I will not surrender her until I get the loot!" explained McClean. "And unless she is inviolate when Alwa and his men arrive, there will be no alliance between them and you—in fact you will find them taking the contrary course!"

They agreed at last, and the missionary, bathed in an icy sweat that was the physical expression of the goading of his conscience, crept out and peered about him, pretending not to see the men who watched. At a sign from him they disappeared from view, and he seized a long hide rope that lay fortuitously at his feet.

"Come along," he whispered to the Prince.

He led Jaimihr through the passage in the rock, off which the ax-hewn cells led on either side, to the far side of the summit, where the parapet was higher, but the wall was considerably less sheer. The Prince's arms were still too sore from being wrenched when they made him prisoner for him to dare trust himself to climb down a lowered rope. Thus it was that the missionary had to make the rope fast beneath Jaimihr's armpits and lower him gradually, the Prince fending himself off the ragged wall with his hands and feet.

It was a tremendous drop. For the last fifty or more feet the wall rose straight, overhung by a ridge that tore the rope. And the rope proved fifteen feet too short. The missionary made it fast and watched to see whether Jaimihr would have the sense to cut himself free and fall, but probably he could not do it, for he hung where he was and spun.

It was five minutes before McClean remembered that in all human probability the Prince had been deprived of all his weapons! It was not likely that he could bite the rope through with his teeth!

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McCLEAN stood wondering what on earth to do, for he certainly could not have pulled Jaimihr all that long way up again. He drew his own knife and was wondering whether to cut the rope himself; he had made it fast with a landlubber's knot that had tightened from the strain until his fingers could not make the least impression on it; and Alwa walked up openly. The Rajput drew his saber, slashed at the rope, and parted it.

"That will serve to jog his recollection of the bargain!" he grinned, peering down to see how Jaimihr landed. By a miracle he landed on his feet; sat down for a moment to recover from the shock; and then walked awkwardly to where his cavalry were sleeping by their horses. Less than ten minutes after he had reached them the whole body lit out across the desert toward Howrah City.

"A clear road at the price of a horsehide rope!" laughed Alwa. "Now for some real man's work!"

The missionary stole away to argue with his conscience. Alwa strode to his troopers' quarters and told off ten men for the task of manning the fortress in his absence. They were most unwilling men, and it needed all his gruff authority and now and then a threat to make them stay behind.

"I must leave ten behind," he insisted. "It takes six men, even at a pinch, to lift the gate. And who shall guard my women? The men who stay behind are more honored than the men who ride!"

The remainder he sent out one by one in different directions, with orders to rally every Rangar they could find at a certain point he named. Then he and Mohammed said good-by to Cunningham and took a trail in the direction where most of the doubtfuls lived—the men who would be likely to need convincing, rousing, awakening from lethargy.

"You think it's better that I stay here?" asked Cunningham.

"Surely, sahib. If only to make sure that that priest of thine makes tracks for Howrah City! While he is here he is a priest, and no man trusts priests. When he is there he will be a man maneuvering to save his life—a man to be depended on!"

He rode away. Mohammed Gunga, following him, turned once and legged up close to Cunningham.

"Now have no fear, Bahadur!" he advised. "Three days from now there will be a finer regiment to lead than ever thundered in thy father's wake. The men we will bring will all be men who have served at some time or other as Irregulars; all swordsmen, all horsemen, all well versed in mounted drill—a regiment of men, for a man to lead and love. *Rung Ho, Bahadur!*"

"*Rung Ho!* See you again, Mohammed Gunga!"

CHAPTER XXVIII

Ye may run and lay your praise
At a shrine of other days,
  By the tomb of him who gat, and her who bore me;
True, I order how I may
And the sons of Kings obey,
  But I'm reaping where another sowed before me.
T. M.

IT WAS arranged that the McCleans with old Joanna should start at dawn for Howrah City. Both father and daughter were too overcome with mingled dread and excitement even to try to sleep. Joanna, very much as usual, snoozed comfortably, curled in a blanket in a corner.

They would run about a hundred different risks, not least of which was the chance of falling in with a party of the Maharaja's men. In fact, if they should encounter anybody before bringing up at Jaimihr's palace it was likely that the whole plan would fizzle into nothing.

Cunningham, after fossicking for a long time in Alwa's armory—which contained, besides weapons of the date, a motley assortment of the tools of war that would have done great credit to a museum of antiquities—produced two pistols. He handed one to the missionary and one to Miss McClean, advising her to hide hers underneath her clothing.

"You know what they're for?" he asked. "No; you'd gain nothing by putting up a fight. They're loaded. All you've got to do is jerk the hammer back and pull the trigger, and the best way not to miss is to hold the muzzle underneath your chin—this way—keeping the butt well out from you. You make sure when you do that.

"The only satisfaction you'll have, if it comes to suicide as a last resource, will be that you've tried to do your duty, and the knowledge that you'll be avenged. I promise that. But I don't think you'll have any need to do it. If I did think it, I'd have thought twice before sending you."

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"How does such a very young man as you come to have all this responsibility?" asked Rosemary, taking the pistol without a shudder. She laughed then, as she noticed Cunningham's discomfort and recognized the decency that hates to talk about itself.

"I suppose I know my own mind," he answered. "These other, awfully decent fellows don't, that's all—if you except Mohammed Gunga. That chap's a wonder. 'Pon my soul, it seems he knew this was coming, and picked me from the start to take charge over here.

"Seems, owing to my dad's reputation, these Rangars think me a sort of reincarnation of efficiency. I've got to try and live up to it; you know, same old game of reaping what you didn't sow and hoping it'll all be over before you wake up! Won't you try and get some sleep before morning? No? Come and sit over by the parapet with me, then."

He carried chairs for the three of them to a point whence he could sit and watch the track that led to Howrah, and so help out the very meager garrison. There, until the waning moon dipped down below the skyline, they talked together, first about the task ahead of each of them, then about the sudden ghastliness of the rebellion, whose extent not one of them could really grasp as yet; last, and much longest, as familiarity gradually grew between them, of youthful reminiscences and Home—he, recalling his life at Eton, she telling of her childhood in the Isle of Skye.

In the darkness and the comparative coolness that came between the setting of the moon and dawn, Rosemary fell asleep, her head pillowed in her father's lap. For a while then, seeing her only dimly through the night, but conscious, as he could not help being, of her youth and charm and of the act of self-sacrifice that she had undertaken without remonstrance, Cunningham felt ashamed.

He began to wonder whether there might not have been some other way; whether he had any right, even for his country's sake, to send a girl on such a mission.

Misgiving began to sap the young man's optimism, and there was no Mohammed Gunga now to stir the soldier in him and encourage iron-willed pursuance of the game to the utter end. He began to doubt; and doubt bred silence.

HE WAS wakened from a reverie by Duncan McClean, who raised his daughter tenderly and got up on his feet. "The dawn will be here soon, Mr. Cunningham. We had better get ready. Well—in case we never meet again—I'm glad I met you."

"Better start before the sun gets up," he answered, gripping the missionary's hand. He was a soldier again. He had had the answer to his thoughts! If the man who was to sacrifice his daughter—or risk her sacrifice—was pleased to have met him, there was not much sense in harboring self-criticism! He shook it off and squared his shoulders, beginning again to think of all that lay ahead.

"Trust to the old woman to guide you and show you a place to rest at, if you must rest. You ought to reach Howrah at dusk tomorrow, for you'll find it quite impossible to travel fast—you're both of you too stiff, for one thing. Lie up somewhere—Joanna will know of a place—until the old woman has taken in a message to Jaimihr, and wait until he sends you some men to escort you through the outskirts of the city. I've got disguises ready for you—a pugree for you, Mr. McClean, and a *purdah* for your daughter.

"You'll travel as a Hindu merchant and his wife. If you get stopped, say very little, but show this——"

He produced the letter, written once by Maharaja Howrah to the Alwa sahib and sent by galloper with the present of a horse. It was signed, and at the bottom of it was the huge, red, royal seal.

"Now go and put the disguise on, while I see to the horses; I'm going to pick out quiet ones if possible, though I warn you they're rare in these parts."

Some twenty minutes later, he led their horses for them gingerly down the slippery rock gorge, and waited at the bottom while six men wound the gate up slowly. Rosemary McClean was quite unrecognizable, draped from head to foot in a traveling veil that might have been Mohammedan or Hindu, and gave no outward sign as to her caste or rank. McClean, in the full attire of a fairly prosperous Hindu, but with no other mark about him to betoken that he might be worth robbing, rode in front of her, high-perched on a native saddle. In front, on a desert pony, rode Joanna, garbed as a man.

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"She *ought* to be traveling in a carriage of some kind," admitted Cunningham, "but we haven't got a single wheeled thing here. If any one asks pertinent questions on the road, you'd better say that she had an *ekka* but that some Rangars took it from you. D'you think you know the language well enough to pass muster?"

"It's a little late to ask me that!" laughed McClean. "Yes—I'm positive I do. Good-by."

They shook hands again, and the three rode off, cantering presently, to make the most of the coolness before the sun got up. Cunningham climbed slowly up the hill, and then watched them from the parapet—wondering, wondering again whether he were justified.

As he put it to himself, it was "the deuce of a position for a man to find himself in!" He caught himself wondering whether his thoughts would have been the same, and whether his conscience would have racked him quite as much, had Rosemary McClean been older, and less lovely, and a little more sour-tongued.

He had to laugh presently at the absurdity of that notion, for Jaimihr would never have bargained for possession of a sour-faced elderly woman. He came to the conclusion that the only thing he could do was to congratulate the *raj* because, at the right minute, the right good-looking woman had been on the spot! But he did not like the circumstances any better; and before two hours had passed the loneliness began to eat into his soul.

Like any other man whose race and breed and training make him self-dependent, he could be alone for weeks on end and scarcely be aware that he had nobody to talk to. But his training had never yet included sending women off on dangerous missions, any more than it had taught him to resist woman's attraction—the charm of a woman's voice, the lure of a woman's eyes. He did not know what was the matter with him, but supposed that his liver must be out of order, or else that the sun had touched him.

Taking a chance on the liver diagnosis, he had out the attenuated garrison and drilled it, both mounted and dismounted, first on the hilltop—where they made the walls reëcho to the clang of grounded butts—and then on the plain below, with the gate wide open in their rear and one man watching from the height above. When he had tired them thoroughly, and himself as well, he set two men on the lookout and retired to sleep; nor did the droning and the wailing music of some women in the harem trouble him.

They called him regularly when the guard was changed, but he slept the greater part of that day, and stood watch all night. The next day, and the third day, he drilled the garrison again—growing horribly impatient, and hourly more worried as to what Byng Bahadur might be doing, and thinking of him.

IT WAS evening of the fourth day when a Rangar woke him, squeezing at his foot and standing silent by the cot.

"Huzoor—Mohammed Gunga comes!"

"Thank God!"

He ran to the parapet and watched in the fading light a little dust cloud, that followed no visible track, but headed straight toward them over the desert.

"How d'you know that's Mohammed Gunga?" he demanded.

"Who else, Huzoor? Who else would ride from that direction all alone, and straight for this nest of wasps? Who else but Alwa or Mohammed Gunga? Alwa said he would not come, but would wait yonder."

"It might be one of Alwa's men."

"We have many good men, sahib, and many good horses; but no man or horse who could come at that pace, after traversing those leagues of desert! That is Mohammed Gunga, unless a new fire eater has been found. And what new men would know the way?"

Soon—staccato like a drumbeat in the silence—came the welcome, thrilling cadence of the horse's hoofs; the steady thunder of a horse hard-ridden, but not foundered. The sun went down, and blackness supervened, but the sound increased, as one lone rider raced with the evening wind, head on.

It seemed like an hour before the lookout challenged from the crag that overhung the gate, before the would-be English words rang out, and the universe—the night birds, jackals, bats—seemed to hold their breath and pause for the answer.

"Howt-uh! Hukkums—thar!"

"Mo—hammed—Gunga—*hail*!"

"Hurrah!"

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The cheer broke bonds from the depth of Cunningham's being, and Mohammed Gunga heard it on the plain below. There was a rush to man the wheels and sweat the gate up, and Cunningham started to run down the zigzag pathway to the gate. He thought better of it, though, and waited where the path gave out on to the courtyard, giving the signal with the cords for the gate to lower away again.

"Evening, Mohammed Gunga!" he said almost casually, as the weary charger's nose appeared above the rise.

"Salaam, Bahadur!"

He dismounted and saluted, and then leaned against his horse.

"I wonder, sahib, whether the horse or I be weariest! Of your favor, water, sahib!"

Cunningham brought him water in a dipper, and the Rajput washed out his horse's mouth; then held out the dipper again to Cunningham for a fresh charge for himself.

"I would not ask the service, sahib, but for the moment my head reels. I must rest before I ride again."

"Is all well, Mohammed Gunga?"

"Aye, sahib! More than well."

"The men are ready?"

"Horsed, armed, and waiting. They keep coming. There were many when I left; there will be three squadrons worthy of the name by the time we get there! Is all well at your end, sahib?"

"Yes, all's well."

"Did the padre people go to Howrah?"

"They started, and they have not returned."

"Then Allah be praised! Inshallah, I will grip that spectacled old woman of a priest by the hand before I die. He has a spark of manhood in him!

"Send me this good horse to the stables, sahib; I am overweary. Have them water him when the heat has left him, and then fed. Let them blanket him lightly. And, sahib, have his legs rubbed—that horse ever loved to have his legs rubbed.

"Allah! I must sleep four hours before I ride. And the Miss sahib—went she bravely?"

"Went as a woman of her race ought to go, Mohammed Gunga."

"*Ha!* She met a man first of her own race, and he made her go! Would she have gone if a coward asked her, think you? Sahib, women are good—at the other end of things! We will ride and fetch her.

"*Ha!* I saw! My eyes are old, but they bear witness yet! Now, food, sahib; for the love of Allah, food, before my belt plate and my backbone touch!"

"I wonder what the old infidel is dreaming of!" swore Cunningham, as Mohammed Gunga staggered to the chamber in the rock where a serving-man was already heaping victuals for him.

"Have me called in four hours, sahib! In four hours I will be a man again!"

CHAPTER XXIX

The freed wolf limped home to his lair,
And lay to lick his sore;
With fangs aflash
" 'Twas something rash
To turn me loose!" he swore.

T. M.

NOW, Jaimihr fondly thought he held a few cards up his sleeve when he made his bargain with Duncan McClean and let himself be lowered from the Alwa sahib's rock. He knew, more than anybody did except the Hindu priests, how desperate the British situation had become at an instant's notice; so he believed the missionary.

He imagined that the missionary—a self-seeking rogue, like all the priests of his acquaintance!—had heard all the dire news, had summed up the situation for himself, and had planned to work it to his own advantage. And to his choice-thinking, royal Hindu mind, perverted by centuries of debauchery, it seemed quite natural that a man should throw his daughter in the scale against her weight in money. It was merely a question of the price.

Above all things, he coveted the throne. He coveted the treasure that went with the throne, and he did not conceal from himself for a minute the necessity for scotching the priests of Siva before he dare touch the treasure. Nor did he omit to reckon with the public clamor that would be likely to be raised, should he deal too roughly with the priests.

So the promised allegiance of the Rangars suited him in many more ways than one. His force and his brother's were matched in numbers and equipment so evenly that he had been able to leave Howrah without fear for his palace while his back was turned. The eight hundred whom he led on a foray to Alwa's fort were scarcely missed, and even had the Maharaja known that he was absent, he would scarcely have dared

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to start reprisals. The Maharaja was too complete a coward to do anything much, until he was forced into it.

The Rangars would be likely to ride rough-shod over the priests, and he calculated that they could take the blame for it, too, afterward. The Rangars would haul out the treasure and broach it—or so the crowd would think. His intention was, while the Rangars under Alwa and Mohammed Gunga (he knew little and cared less of Cunningham) were holding Howrah's men at bay, to get after the treasure with his own men and hide it out of reach of the Rangars before those rapacious gentlemen could get their fingers on more of it than he chose to pay them.

Afterward he meant to point to the damage done and raise a howl of sacrilege and loot, to claim that the Rangars had taken all the treasure, and to make them so unpopular with the crowd that they would be driven back to their homes again, scattered and harmless for some time to come.

As for Rosemary McClean, his brown eyes glowed at the thought of her. In all likelihood he cherished no idea of really making her Maharanee; he realized too thoroughly what that would mean. A woman of his own race would have been content to accept the usual status of a whisperer from behind the close-meshed screens.

Not so an Englishwoman, with no friends to keep her company and nothing in the world to do but think. She, he realized, would expect to make something definite of her position, and that would suit neither his creed (which was superficial with him), nor custom (which was iron-bound and utterly unbreakable), nor convenience, which counted most. The fate he had in store for her was probably not such as to commend him in the thoughts of honest men.

But, after all, the treasure and the throne were his objective; Rosemary McClean was a side issue. He stood ready to lose her altogether, provided that would help him win. Like many another Hindu in that hour, he did not overlook the distant, but actual, possibility that Britain might—by dint of luck and grit and the Act of God, as the insurance papers have it—pull through the crisis. Then he was well aware there would be an aftermath, and Hindu-like he schemed in readiness for that as well.

In that event, his plan was complicated but astute. He would be able to prove that Rosemary McClean and her father had come to him of their own free will. He would say that they had asked protection. He had evidence, too, that Howrah had been in communication with the Alwa sahib. It suited him very well, then, to have both McCleans present, or close at hand, when the Rangars put in their appearance.

He would be able to claim afterward that the McCleans were spies. He would say that Alwa and his Rangars were in league with Howrah; that the whole raid had been a scheme to get the better of the priests of Siva and himself; that the treasure had been needed to finance operations against the British, whose cause the McCleans had deserted when the news of the rebellion reached them. It would not be the first time in history that British citizens had deserted to the enemy, and, judged by Eastern standards, the story that the McCleans had been used to lead the Rangars to the treasure would be plausible enough. Or so it seemed to him.

In the meantime, he would have established himself on the throne, the Rangars would have been dispersed, his brother would be dead, and there would be ample proof against him of intrigue—the silent East, that always holds its tongue for the benefit of him who wins, would keep all secrets—and the McCleans, father and daughter, could be conveniently poisoned, or torn asunder by the mob in righteous indignation; or they might disappear.

It was purely Eastern logic, ignoring many a major point and counting in a dozen minor ones. Men who think, scheme, and act indirectly seldom see much farther than their own small circumscribed horizon. He entirely overlooked the fact that the Rangars might be cleverer than he and more direct; he ignored absolutely even the suspicion of a thought that the McCleans might also hold cards up their sleeves; and he forgot that his brother—who was notoriously anti-British, and notoriously undecided, but none the less the man with the advantage of possession—might be playing double games as well.

HE WAS delighted when Joanna, dressed like a man, turned up at his palace gate and cajoled her way in past the guards. To be asked for an escort to bring the McCleans into Howrah fitted

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his plan as a key might fit a lock. Now they could never pretend, nobody could pretend, that he had seized them.

He sent a carriage out for them, and when they came placed a whole floor of the palace at their disposal, treating both of them like royalty. He made no attempt to molest or interfere with either of them, but told off plenty of witnesses who might swear subsequently that they had seen how well his guests were treated.

Should the cat jump the way he wanted it; should the Rangars come and go away with McClean and Rosemary left behind; should he be Maharaja and the British lose in their desperate defense of Empire; then, why, then the same witnesses would swear to any other thing he told them to, or else hold their tongues. For the present, it was well to have witnesses of the right sort, and to keep on the soft side of Duncan McClean, who stood in with the very necessary Rangars.

Above all things, he needed the service of those Rangars first, for without them he thought himself barely strong enough, or at best none too strong, to depose his brother.

So, to their great and most suspicious amazement, the McCleans found themselves surrounded by luxury and treated with respect.

But, while Jaimihr was making his plans, Howrah too was far from being idle. It is not to be forgotten that the priests of Siva had been foremost, at least in that part of India, in fomenting the rebellion. They urged Howrah constantly to take the field against the British, and it was only the knowledge that his brother would make a bid for the throne the moment that his back was turned or his troops despatched to the scene of action that made him hold his hand.

He knew that Alwa hated and despised him; so he knew that Alwa could not be induced to come and help him unless Jaimihr first attacked him. Alwa would be sure to stick to the letter of his promise to uphold him on the throne, and would make no unnecessary move.

"Very well!" he told the priests. "But first I will deal with Jaimihr. Let him move first!"

He consented to collect his army and keep it under arms; he even paid it something on account of arrears of wages, and served out rations.

"I must deal with Jaimihr first!" he kept asserting.

So the priests, who cared nothing which of the two was Maharaja provided that the British were driven out of India, went to Jaimihr and urged him to strike quickly for the throne.

"Howrah's men will desert to you the moment you make a move," they promised him.

"Wait!" counseled Jaimihr. "Wait but a day or two. I will move when I am ready."

"But you are ready. You have more men than he."

"Wait!" was the only answer.

So both men waited, each with an army ready that was big for those parts, and more than usually efficient. And each man, as his spies brought news of a Rangar regiment collecting in the district, fondly thought that recruits were coming for his cause, and that within a day or two the cavalry would turn up on the scene to bump the balance down to his advantage.

The priests swore horribly. They knew too about the coming together of Mohammedan Irregulars, and the injection of another element, another creed, into the complication "did not suit their book." They were the only men, who had any insight into what was going on, who were worried about Alwa.

CHAPTER XXX

The ringed wolf glared the circle round,
And baleful was his eye;
"Now, heed ye how ye draw the net,"
Quoth he; "I'll do some damage yet
Or ere I come to die!"

T. M.

THE mare that had been a present to Cunningham from the Rissaldar was brought out saddled, together with another fresh horse for Mohammed Gunga. The veteran had needed no calling, for with a soldier's instinct he had awakened just before the self-allotted four hours had expired. He mounted a little stiffly, and tried the horse's paces up and down the courtyard once or twice, before nodding to Cunningham.

"Ready, sahib."

"Ready, Mohammed Gunga."

But there was one other matter, after all, to attend to first.

"That horse of mine that brought me hither," he growled to the man who stood

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with the gong cords, one in each hand, "is left in thy particular charge. I shall tell the Alwa sahib what I now tell thee—that horse will be required of thee, fit, good-tempered, light-mouthed, uninjured. There will be a reward in the one case, but in the other I would not stand in thy shoes! It is a trust!"

"Come along, Rissaldar, if you are coming. We're wasting time."

"Nay, but a good horse is like a woman, sahib—to be left in faithful hands, and sacrificed for nothing less than duty. Lead on, Bahadur; I will join thee at the gate."

He had several directions to give for the horse's better care, and Cunningham had to wait at the foot for at least five minutes for him. Then for another minute the two sat side by side while the great gate rose slowly—grudgingly it seemed.

"If we ride under here again, Bahadur, we shall come with honor thick on us. From now there will be no peace until we have ripped it with our sabers from the very belly of rebellion! Ride!"

The gate clanged down behind them, and neither horse required the spur to send him racing for his bit across the sand. They went like shadows, knee to knee, casting other shadows, moon-made, wind-driven.

"Now, sahib—" the Rissaldar had been thinking hard, and excitement had too great a hold on Cunningham to let him speak; he was not of the type that chatters when the hour has come to loosen sabers and sit tight—"in the matter of what lies ahead. These men—and there are many of them, all good men—have been told that a Cunnigan will lead them. Alwa has given his word, and I mine, that in the matter of a leader there is nothing left to be desired; and my five have told of certain incidents. Therefore they await thee with no little keenness; they will be all eyes and ears.

"It might be well to set the pace a little slower, for a man looks better on a fresh horse than on a weary one."

"I'm thinking of the two McCleans in Howrah, and of General Byng."

"I, too. All, sahib—*all*—depends now on the impression created on the men who wait. Rein in a little. Thy father's name, and mine, and Alwa's, are all behind thee; but have a sound horse between thy legs and a trumpet in thy throat when we get there! I have seen more than one officer have to fight uphill for the hearts of his men because his horse stumbled or looked shabby on the first parade."

So Cunningham, still saying nothing, drew in to a steady canter; he was conscious of something not at all like a trumpet that was nearly choking him, and he did not care to let even the Rissaldar know that emotion held him in its grip.

"There are three squadrons, sahib, each of about five hundred men. Alwa has the right wing, I the left. The horses are as good as any in this part of India, for each man brought his best to do thee honor. Each man carries four days' rations in his saddlebag, and two days' rations for his horse. More horse feed is collecting, and they are bringing wagons to follow when we give the word.

"But there would be no sense in taking wagons into Howrah—we can pick them up on the journey back. That is all, sahib. There will be no time for talk or drill. Take charge the moment we get there, trust to the men's understanding each command, and lead off without delay."

"All right," said Cunningham—two English words that went much farther to allay the Rissaldar's anxiety than any rhetoric would have done. "But d'you mean the men don't understand English words of command?"

"Many of them do, sahib. They all understand formations, and those that know the English words are teaching the others while they wait for us. There is not one man among them but has couched a lance in some force or other."

"Have they all got lances?"

"All the front rank men carry lance and saber; the rear ranks sabers only."

"Good."

After two hours of it the going changed, and became a quick succession of ever deepening gorges cleft in sandstone. Far away in the distance to the left there rose a glow that showed where Howrah City was keeping vigil — doubtless with watchfires at every street corner. It looked almost as if the distant city were in flames. Ahead was the gloom of hell mouth, and the silence of the space beyond the stars.

IT WAS with that strange, unclassified, unnamed sixth sense that soldiers, savages, and some others have that Cunningham became aware of life ahead of him—massed, strong-breathing,

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ready-waiting life, spring-bent in the quivering blackness.

A little farther, and he caught the ring of a curb chain. Then a horse whinnied and a saber clanked; another horse answered, and a hoarse voice swore low at a restive charger. His own mare neighed, throwing her head high, and some one challenged.

"How-ut! Hukkums—thar!"

A horseman rode out of the night to examine them at close quarters, instead of waiting for the answer. He peered cautiously at Cunningham, glanced at Mohammed Gunga, and then wheeled, spinning his horse as the dust eddies twist in the sudden hot-wind gusts.

"*Sahib Bahadur hai!*" he shouted, racing back.

The night became instantly alive with jingling movement, as line on line of quite invisible light-horsemen, self-disciplined and eager to obey, took up their dressing. The overhanging cliff of sandstone hid the moon, but here and there was the gleam of eyeballs in the dark—now horse's, now rider's —and a hint of steel, held vertically. No human being could have guessed the length of the gorge, nor the number of the men who waited in it, for the restless footfalls stamped in inch-deep sand.

"*Salaam, Bahadur!*"

It was Alwa, saluting with drawn saber, reining back a blooded war horse, to get all the spectacular emotion out of the encounter that he could.

"Here are fifteen hundred, eight and fifty —all Rangars, all true men, all pledged to see thee unsinged through the flames of Eblis! Do me the honor of a quick inspection, sahib!"

"Certainly," smiled Cunningham.

"I have told them, sahib, that their homes, their women, and their honor are all guaranteed them. They make no other terms."

"I guarantee them that," said Cunningham, loud enough at least for the nearest ranks to hear.

"Then come."

"Thanks," said Cunningham. "I'll take their salute first."

"Pardon, Bahadur!"

Alwa filled his lungs and faced the unseen lines.

"Rangars!" he roared. "Your leader! General—salute—Preeee-sent—sabers!"

There was a sudden movement, the ring of whipped-out metal, a bird's-wing beat, as fifteen hundred hilts rose suddenly as one hilt to be kissed, followed by a sharp intake of breath all down the lines.

It wasn't bad—not bad at all, thought Cunningham. It wasn't done as Regulars would have worked it. There was the little matter of the lances, that he could make out dimly now, and he could detect even in the dark that half of the men had been caught wondering how to salute with lance and saber both.

But Alwa's order had been at fault, and the effort, the respect, the desire to act together were all there. He drew his own mare back a little, to where the blackness was less black, and returned the salute with full military dignity.

"Ree—turn—sabers!" ordered Alwa, and that movement was accomplished better.

Cunningham rode once, slowly, down the long line of the front rank, letting each man look him over; then back again along the rear rank, risking a kick or two, for there was no room for the men behind to fall back to open order; there was barely space for him to ride between the lines. To have moved the front rank forward would have been to call Alwa's arrangements into question, and he did not choose to do anything of that sort at the moment; he judged it would be better to get kicked.

So, as often happens when a man takes chances for the sake of tact, he was not kicked. He was not choking now. The soldier instinct, that is born in a man like statesmanship or poetry, but that never can be taught, had full command over all his other senses, and when he spurred out to the front again his voice rang loud and clear, like a trumpet through the night.

With a dozen ground-scouts scattered out ahead of them, they drummed out of the gorge and thundered by squadrons on the plain beyond, straight as the jackal runs, for Howrah City. Alwa, leaving his own squadron to canter at Cunningham's side, gave him the only new intelligence that mattered.

"I have sent word on ahead that we are coming, sahib. One man went to the Maharaja and one to Jaimihr. With luck, we shall plunge into the middle of a general engagement. At the least, we shall find both sides ready for a fight!"

But they could have been seen coming in any case, for the sun was high when the

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wall of Howrah City rose above the skyline. They could make out an army gathering outside the palace wall, on the tree-lined *maidan* that faced it; the city wall was low in places, and from the higher places of the undulating desert a man with keen eyes could make out more than the men inside might guess.

Presently they dipped into the last depression in which Howrah lay, and then a short halt for a consultation seemed the best plan. But even as they halted, a khaki-clad, shriveled figure of a man leaped up from behind a sand ridge and raced toward Cunningham, shouting to him and gesticulating wildly. A trooper intercepted him, and then, roaring with laughter, picked him up and carried him to where the three commanders sat.

"A woman! By the beard of Abraham, a woman!"

"Joanna! Translate, Mohammed Gunga; I can't make head or tail of what she's saying."

"Sahib, she says Jaimihr has tricked his brother, and the two forces are out of touch. The Maharaja expected to give battle at the south end of the city, and is hurrying to catch Jaimihr now on the *maidan* by the palace wall. Jaimihr stole a march on him, you understand, and got between him and us. Howrah has fired Jaimihr's palace —it was that we saw burning—but Jaimihr counts on storming *his* palace in return the moment we arrive."

"And the McCleans?"

"Are with Jaimihr, sahib."

"Good. Lead on."

The squadrons swooped along the wall in a cloud of whirling dust, that hung above them like a pall. Some of Jaimihr's men, stationed there for the purpose, flung the gates wide, and they wheeled in fours sharp to the right inside, to be brought up again by Duncan McClean, pugreed still, but sitting his horse with the long stirrup that a Hindu trader almost never uses.

"MR. CUNNINGHAM, if you had come an hour later I think the cause would have been hopeless. I have lied until I'm ashamed to look my daughter in the face, and she is in Jaimihr's hands still. I believe that but for the burning of his palace he would have sent her back there. As things are, he has her with him, closely guarded in a carriage with four horses. She is surrounded by his men. Howrah is approaching to attack him, so instead of waiting for your men he has started to get at the treasure and have that, whatever happens.

"Now listen! This sounds unbelievable, but you must take my word for it. All that tremendous hoard has been protected all this time by nothing better than a two-foot wall of stone! The approach to it is guarded by about fifty doors, all trebly locked and barred. The door of the treasure room is guarded by cannon, that will go off the moment the door is opened by any one who doesn't know the trick. And the back of the room is this palace wall! They're breaking through the wall now, to get the treasure! But, in God's name, Mr. Cunningham, my daughter is worth that treasure ten times over. Do get her first!"

"Have you any money?" asked Cunningham.

"Not much."

"Well, bet it all on my getting your daughter out first—if you can find any one to bet with! Forward!"

Jaimihr had taken one precaution at his rear, but only one. Most of his men—more than four thousand at the lowest estimate —were lined up facing the direction from which Howrah's army was approaching. But, with the sole purpose of preventing Cunningham and the Rangars from getting too close to Rosemary McClean, he had set five hundred men, densely packed, across the road. Her carriage was just visible, drawn close against the wall, and just on the other side of it fifty men with iron bars and hastily made battering-rams were dinning at the wall itself.

The leader of the five hundred who blocked the road spurred up to Cunningham and pointed. The dust of Howrah's army was just visible at the far end of the palace wall.

"The Jaimihr sahib says, 'Ride around, get between us and Howrah's men, and hold them back.' He will support you from the rear."

"Presently!" said Cunningham. "Get out of my way, will you! You, too, McClean. Look sharp!"

McClean, hardly knowing why, raced for the wall, and Jaimihr's man scented something wrong. He turned and spurred back to his command, shouting as he rode; but he shouted too late. Just as the palace wall

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succumbed to the onslaught of the crowbars and came down with a crash, Cunningham left two squadrons behind, and with his own charged straight at the startled five hundred. Giving them barely time to draw, he led his men crashing into them, unhorsed them, rode through and over them, and sent about a hundred of them reeling in confusion past Jaimihr into the ranks of the men beyond.

Jaimihr, realizing too late that the Rangars were against him instead of for him, shouted and made a rush for the carriage, trying vainly to get it started. He missed being made prisoner himself by the narrowest margin as the postilions were cut down and four Rangars seized the reins. The Prince ran one man through and raced for the formed-up army.

"Sit quiet!" called Cunningham. "You're safe!"

The heavy, swaying carriage rumbled around, and the horses strained to satisfy the Rangars who gripped the reins. In a moment it was moving at a gallop; two minutes later it was backed against the wall, and Rosemary McClean stepped out behind three squadrons.

"Now, all together!" shouted Cunningham.

It was evident to Jaimihr that his only chance now was to smash the Rangars first. His brother's forces were less than two miles away, and—worse yet!—the gaping wall was nearer to the Rangars than himself. Goaded by greed, startled out of his senses by the unexpected turn affairs had taken, he did the one worst thing he could have done. Instead of opening fire and volleying the helpless cavalry at short range, he led a charge in the attempt to get a thousand of his men between the Rangars and the treasure—and he and his men were met considerably more than half way by a whirlwind, lance-tipped and roaring.

Perhaps he had no stomach for it. At least, as commander of an army, he had the right to seek safety, for while he lived there was a chance that he might save the day by leadership. Jaimihr escaped; half of his thousand threw their weapons down; some lay face downward in the road, to let the horses gallop over them; and the remainder ran. There were only a few men killed, and during the momentary check while his squadrons formed again in one long line facing Jaimihr's army, Cunningham told off a most unwilling fifty to pursue the fugitives.

THIS time Jaimihr used a little more discretion. A volley that would have withered had its aim been better burst from the still unshaken men that he had left. They still outnumbered Cunningham's force by more than two to one, and a slight success would be enough to put courage into them. Nine or ten of Cunningham's men went down, but he did not wait for a second volley.

Three squadrons, all in line, tucked down their lances and leaped forward at a word. The three hundred yards between them and their enemy afforded them just space enough to get up speed, and the shock as they struck the hurriedly reloading infantry would have shifted a stone wall. Jaimihr had had no time to get them into anything resembling a proper fighting formation; they were a parallelogram of meat, waiting to be cut up. As Mohammed Gunga stated afterward, when some of the younger men were a bit inclined to crow, it was not fighting.

Within five minutes the whole of Jaimihr's army was racing, scattering as it ran, pell-mell for the spot where Howrah's mob waited to volley at them. Cunningham, after a charge or two to make the rout complete, called off his Rangars to collect their wounded, and left Howrah to finish how he chose. He could hear and see the firing, and it happened to suit his purpose to keep Howrah busy for a little while.

As he rode back at a trot to inspect the huge gap yawning in the wall, Mohammed Gunga caught him and was about to speak. But suddenly the veteran touched his arm and pointed.

"Look, sahib! Look!"

Jaimihr—and no one but a wizard could have told how he had managed to slip around or through them unobserved—was riding as a man rides at a tent peg, crouching low, full pelt for Rosemary McClean!

Cunningham rammed in his spurs, and Mohammed Gunga raced behind him, but Jaimihr had the start of them. He aimed a saber thrust at Duncan McClean, who had crowded his daughter to the wall and stood in front of her. The missionary fell, and the Prince seized the struggling girl in his arms, hoisted her to the saddle, and spurred off.

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But two things prevented him. The fifty Rangars who had been sent off in pursuit of the first batch of fugitives were returning, and cut off his flight; and the extra weight on his horse prevented him from making his escape by speed alone. He rode for two minutes with the frenzy of a savage before he realized the futility of it; it was Cunningham's mare, gaining on him stride over stride, that let him know he would be cut down like a dog from behind unless he surrendered his prize.

So he laughed and threw the girl to the ground; then wheeled and charged at Cunningham. He guessed that but for Cunningham that number of Rangars would never have agreed on a given plan; he must have realized by that time that Duncan McClean had tricked him; and he evidently made his mind up to get revenge on at least one of the two Europeans who had robbed him of a throne. He came on like a man when he did come, and Cunningham met him point to point.

They fought over a quarter of a mile of ground, for Jaimihr proved to be as useful with his weapon as Mohammed Gunga's teaching had made Cunningham. There was plenty of time for the re-formed squadrons to see what was happening; plenty of time for Alwa, who had his own account to settle up with Jaimihr, to leave his squadron and come thundering up to help. Mohammed Gunga dodged and watched his opportunity on one side, for it would not have suited him at all to have his leader killed at this stage of the game, and on the other side Alwa spurred for all that there was in him.

Jaimihr charged Cunningham for the dozenth time; missed, and charged past to wheel again; then came at him again with the most vindictive rush of all. Again Cunningham met him point to point. The two blades locked and bent like springs as they wrenched at them.

Cunningham's blade snapped. At once he snatched at his mare and spun her around before Jaimihr could recover, then rammed both spurs in and bore down on the Hindu with but half a saber. He had Jaimihr on the near side, at a disadvantage. Jaimihr tried to maneuver for position, and the half saber went home below his ribs.

He dropped bleeding in the dust at the second that Alwa and Mohammed Gunga reined in, grinning, face to face, their horses' breasts pressed tight against the charger Jaimihr rode. The horse screamed as the shock crushed the breath out of him.

"You robbed me of my man, sahib, by about a hair's breadth!" laughed Alwa.

"And you have left your squadron leaderless without my permission!" answered Cunningham. "You, too, Mohammed Gunga!"

"But, sahib——"

"Are you here to argue, or to obey?"

Mohammed Gunga flushed, and rode back. Alwa grinned and started after him. Cunningham, without another glance at the dead Prince, rode up to Rosemary McClean, who had picked herself up, but stood bewildered. She had watched the duel, and that alone would have been enough to upset the nerves of most women.

"PUT your foot on mine," he said reassuringly, "and swing yourself up behind me if you can. If not, I'll pick you up in front."

She tried, and failed; so he put both arms under hers and lifted her. Fresh from killing a man, with a man's blood on his broken sword, and the sweat of fighting not yet dry on him, he held a woman in his arms for the first time in his life.

His hand had been steady when it struck below Jaimihr's ribs, but now it trembled. His eyes had been stern and blazing less than two minutes before; now they looked down into a woman's eyes, and grew strangely softer all at once. His mouth had been a hard, tight line under a scrubbly upper lip, but his lips had parted now a little, and his smile was a boy's; not nervous, nor mischievous—just a happy boy's.

She smiled too, for nobody could help it when young Cunningham looked that way. And he bent his head and kissed her on the lips.

"You look like a blackguard!" she said. "And how long is it since you shaved? But——"

"But what?" he asked.

He was interrupted by a roar from his own men. He had ridden without caring where he went, and his mare had naturally taken him back to where the squadrons waited with their rear to the dark gap in the wall. The situation suited every Rangar of them! That was the way that a man should win his woman, by fighting for her; and they cheered him to the echo. Red

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as a beet, he rode to the carriage and wrenched the door open.

"Get inside and stay there until further orders!" he commanded. "Nurse your father; he looks as though he needs it!"

She laughed at him as she dropped to the ground and obeyed him, for a glance showed that her father's injury was nothing serious. He had received a grazing blow and nothing worse, for Jaimihr had been in too great a hurry to make certain of his aim, and only the flat of the saber had struck him and knocked him off his feet. He jumped into the carriage without assistance, and Cunningham did not wait to ask him whether he had seen the incident following the fight!

"Are you satisfied that you have done enough toward upholding Howrah on his throne?" he asked Alwa.

"Surely, sahib. Jaimihr is dead. I consider my word fulfilled."

"Then take two men and a flag of truce. Ride forward, and get word with the Maharaja. Tell him I await him here, and wish to speak with him. Say that he can come with ten men of his own, and that if he brings one more, I'll fight. Assure him that I'll begin by hauling out the treasure and then setting fire to the palace. But tell him that if he comes with only ten men and tries no tricks, he can come as my friend and will be treated accordingly."

"Why not take the treasure first, sahib?"

"Do as I say! I promised these gentlemen of yours I would protect their honor, didn't I?"

Alwa tied a white cloth on a lance, and cantered off with two men behind him.

CHAPTER XXXI

Friends I have sought me of varying stations,
Men of all ranks and of different nations;
Some are in jail now, and some are deceased.
Two, though, I found to be experts at sundering
Me and my revenue, leaving me wondering
Which was the costlier—soldier or priest.

T. M.

A LITTLE more than one hour later the Maharaja Howrah, sulky and disgruntled, but doing his level best to appear at ease, faced young Cunningham across a table in the treasure vault. Outside was a row of wagons, drawn by horses and closely guarded by a squadron of the Rangars. Behind Cunningham stood Alwa and Mohammed Gunga; behind the Maharaja were two of his court officials. There were pen and ink and the royal seal between them on the table.

"So, Maharaja sahib. They are all sealed, and each chest is marked on the outside with its contents. I'm sorry there was no time to weigh the gold, but the number of the ingots ought to be enough. And of course you'll understand it wasn't possible to count all those unset stones—that 'ud take a week; but your seal is on that big chest too, so you'll know if it's been opened. You are certain you can preserve the peace of your State with the army you have?"

"Yes," said the Maharaja curtly.

"Don't want me to leave a squadron of my men to help you out?"

"No!"

He said that even more abruptly.

"Good. Of course, since you won't have to spare men to guard the treasure now, you'll have all the more to keep peace in the district with, won't you? Let me repeat the terms of our bargain; they're written here, but let's be sure there is no mistake.

"I agree to deliver your treasure into safe keeping until the rebellion is over, and to report to my Government that you are friendly disposed toward us. You, in return, guarantee to protect the families and property of all these gentlemen who ride with me. It is mutually agreed that any damage done to their homes during their absence shall be made good out of your treasure, but that should you keep your part of the agreement the treasure shall be handed back to you intact. Is that correct?"

"Yes," said the Maharaja, shifting in his seat uneasily.

"Is there anything else?"

"One other thing. I am outmaneuvered and I have surrendered with the best grace possible. That agreement stands in my name, and no other man's?"

"Certainly."

"The priests of Siva are not parties to it?"

"I've had nothing whatever to do with them," said Cunningham.

"That is all then, sahib. I am satisfied."

"While we're about it, Maharaja sahib, let's scotch those priests altogether. McClean sahib has told me that suttee has been practised here as a regular thing. That's got to stop, and we may as well stop it now.

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"Of course, I shall keep my word about the treasure, and you'll get it back if you live up to the bargain you have made; but my Government will know now where it is, and they'll be likely to impose quite a considerable fine on you when the rebellion's over unless this suttee's put an end to. Besides, you couldn't think of a better way of scoring off the priests than by enforcing the law and abolishing the practise. Think that over, Maharaja sahib."

Howrah swore into his beard, as any ruling potentate might well do at being dictated to by a boy of little more than twenty-two.

"I will do my best, sahib," he answered. "I am with the British, not against them."

"Good for you!—er, I mean, that's right."

He turned to Alwa, and looked straight into the Rangar's eyes.

"Are you satisfied with the guarantee?" he asked.

"Sahib, I am more than satisfied."

"Good. Oh, and, Maharaja sahib, since we've fought your battle for you, and lost a few men, and are going to guard your treasure for you, and be your friends, and all that kind of thing, don't you think you'd like to do something for us; not much, but just a little thing?"

"I am in your power. You have but to command."

"Oh, no. I don't want to force anything. We're friends—talking as friends. I ask a favor."

"It is granted, sahib."

"A horse or two, that's all."

"How many horses, sahib?"

"Oh, not more than one each."

The Maharaja pulled a wry face, but bowed assent. It would very nearly empty his stables, but he knew when he could not help himself. Mohammed Gunga clapped a hand to his mouth and left the vault hurriedly.

"You understand, this is not a demand, Maharaja sahib. I take it that you offer me these horses as an act of royal courtesy, and as additional proof of friendliness?"

"Surely, sahib."

"My men will be very grateful to you. This will enable them to reach the scene of action with their own horses in good shape. I'm sure it's awfully good of you to have offered them!"

Outside, where the late afternoon sun was gradually letting things cool down, Mohammed Gunga leaned against the wall and roared with laughter, as he explained a few details to the admiring troopers.

"A horse or two, says he! How many? Oh, just a horse or two, Maharaja sahib—merely a horse apiece! Fifteen hundred horses! A horse or two! Oh—ha-ha-ha-ha-ha-ho!

"Allah! But that boy will make a better soldier than his father! As a favor he asked them; no compulsion, mind you; just as a favor! Allah! What is he asking now, I wonder! Ha-ha-ha-ha-ha-ho-ho-ho!"

CHAPTER XXXII

Now, fifteen hundred, horse and man,
Reel at the word of one!
Loosed by the brazen trumpet's peal—
Knee to knee, and toe on heel—
Troop on troop the squadrons wheel,
Outrivaling the sun!

T. M.

WITHIN a fortnight of the outbreak of the Mutiny, men spoke with bated breath about the Act of God. It burst at that moment when India's reins were in the hands of some of the worst incompetents in history. A week found strong men in control of things—the right men, with the right handful behind them.

Some of the men in charge went mad and were relieved. Some threw up their commands. Some of the worst incompetents were killed by the mutineers, and more than one man who could have changed the course of history for the worse was taken sick and died. Instead of finding themselves faced by spineless nincompoops, the rebels reeled before the sudden, well timed tactics of real officers, with eyes and ears and brains. The mask was off on both sides, and the sudden, stripped efficiency of the one was no less disconcerting than the unexpected rebellion of the other.

Byng Bahadur—"Byng the Brigadier"—was in command of a force again within three days of the news of the first massacre, and because he was Byng, with Byng's record, and Byng's ability to handle loyal natives, the men who succeeded to the reins packed him off at once with a free hand, and with no other orders than to hit, hit hard, and keep on hitting.

"Go for them, Byng, old man. Live off the country, keep moving, and don't let 'em guess once what your next move's going to be!"

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So Byng recruited as he went, and struck ke a brain-controlled tornado at whatver crossed his path. But irreparable amage had been done before the old school ere relieved, and Byng, like others, was erribly short of men. Many of his own rregulars were so enraged at having been isbanded at a moment's notice that they efused to return to him. Their honor, s they saw it, had been outraged.

Only two British regiments could be pared him, and they were both thinned by sickness from the first. They were Sikhs who formed the bulk of his headquarterless brigade, and many of them were last-minute friends, who came to him unorganized and almost utterly undrilled.

But Byng was a man of genius, and his bare reputation was enough to offset much in the way of unpreparedness. He coaxed and licked and praised his new men into shape as he went along. Within a week he had stormed Deeseera, blowing up the rebels' greatest reserve of ammunition and momentarily stunning the rebellion's leaders. But cholera took charge in the city, and two days later found him hurrying out again to camp, where there was uncontaminated water, on rising ground that gave him the command of three main roads. It was there that the rebels cornered him.

They blew up a hundred-yard-long bridge behind him at the one point where a swiftly running river could be crossed, and from two other sides at once mutinied native regiments and thousands from the countryside flocked, hurrying to take a hand in what seemed destined to be Byng's last action. The fact that so many swaggering soldier Sikhs were cornered with him was sufficient in itself to bring out Hindu and Mohammedan alike.

The mutinous regiments had all been drilled and taught by British officers until they were as nearly perfect as the military knowledge of the day could make them. The fact that they had killed their officers served only to make them savage without detracting much from their efficiency. They had native officers quite capable of taking charge, and sense enough to retain their discipline.

So Byng entrenched himself on the gradual rise, and sent out as many messengers as he could spare to bring reënforcements from whatever source obtainable. Then, when almost none came, he got ready to die where he stood, using all the soldier gift he had to put courage into the last-ditch loyalists who offered to die with him. He had counted most on aid from Cunningham and Mohammed Gunga, but that source seemed to have failed him, and he gave up hope of their arrival when a body of several thousand rebels took up position on his flank, and cut off approach from the direction whence Cunningham should come.

THE sun blazed down like molten hell on sick and wounded alike. Rotting carcasses of horses and cattle, killed by the rebels' artillery fire, lay stinking here and there, and there was no possibility of disposing of them. A day came very soon indeed when horse or occasional transport bullock was all there was to eat, and a night came when Govind Singh, the leader of the Sikhs, came to him and remonstrated.

The old man had to be carried to Byng's tent, for a round-shot had disabled him. He had himself set down by the tent door, where the General sat on a campstool.

"General sahib, I have not been asked for advice; I am here to offer it."

The huge black dome of heaven was punctuated by a billion dots of steely white that looked like pin pricks. All the light there was came from the fitful watchfires, where even the wagons were being burned now that the meager supply of rough timber was giving out. The rebels, too, were burning everything on which they could lay their hands, and from between the spaced-out glow of their bonfires came ever and again the spurt of cannon flame.

"Speak, Govind Singh!"

"Sahib, we have no artillery with which to answer them. We have no food, and the supply of ammunition wanes. Shall we die here, like cattle in a slaughter house?"

"This is as good as any other place," said Byng.

"Nay, sahib!"

"How, then?"

"In *their* lines is a better place! Here is nothing better than a shambles, with none but our men falling. They know that our food is giving out. They know that we lose heavily. They wait. They will wait for days yet, before they close in to finish what their guns have but begun, and—then—how many will there be to die desperately, as is fitting?"

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"We might get reënforcements in the morning, Govind Singh."

"And again we might not, sahib!"

"I sent a number of messengers before we were shut in."

"Yes, sahib—and to whom? To men who would ask you to reënforce them, if they could get word to you! Tomorrow our rear will be surrounded, too; they have laid planks across the little streams behind us, and are preparing to drag guns to that side also.

"Now, sahib, we have fire left in us. We can smite yet, and do damage while we die. Tomorrow night may find us decimated and without heart for the finish. I advise you to advance at dawn, sahib!"

That advice came as a great relief to Byng Bahadur. He had been the first to see the hopelessness of the position, and every instinct that he had told him to finish matters—not in the last reeking ditch, but ahead, where the enemy would suffer fearfully while a desperate charge roared into them, to peter out when the last man went down fighting.

Surrender was unthinkable, and in any event would have been no good, for the mutineers would be sure to butcher all their prisoners. His only other chance had been to hold out until relief came, and that hope was now forlorn.

A Mohammedan stepped out of blackness and saluted him—a native officer, in charge of a handful of Irregular cavalry, whose horses had all been shot.

"Well, what is it?"

"This, sahib. Do we die here? I and my men would prefer to die yonder, where a mutineer or two would pay the price!"

A Goorkha officer, small as a Japanese, and sturdy-looking, came up next. The whole thing was evidently preconcerted.

"My men ask leave to show the way into the ranks ahead, General sahib. They are overweary of this shambles!"

"We will advance at dawn!" said Byng. "Egan!" He turned to a British officer who was very nearly all the staff he had. "Drag that table up. Let's have some paper here, and a pencil, and we'll work out the best plan possible."

He sent for the commanding officers of the British regiments—both of them Captains, but the seniors surviving—and a weird scene followed around the lamp set on the tiny table. British, Sikh, Mohammedan and Goorkha clustered close to him and watched as his pencil traced the different positions and showed the movement that was to make the morrow's finish—their faces outlined in the lamp's yellow glow, and their breath coming deep and slow as they agreed on how the greatest damage could be done the enemy before the last man died.

As he finished, and assigned each leader to his share in the last assault that any one of them would take a part in, a streak of light blazed suddenly across the sky. A shooting star swept in a wide parabola to the horizon. A murmur went up from the wakeful lines, and the silence of the graveyard followed.

"There is our sign, sahib!" laughed the Mohammedan.

The old Sikh nodded, and the Goorkha grinned.

"It is the end!" he said, without a trace of discouragement.

"Nonsense!" said Byng, his face too turned upwards.

"What, then, does it mean, sahib?"

"That——It means that God Almighty has relieved a picket. We're the picket. We're relieved! We advance at dawn, and we'll get through somehow! Join your commands, gentlemen, and explain the details carefully to your men. Let's have no misunderstandings."

THE dawn rose golden and beautiful upon a sleepless camp that reeked and steamed with hell-hot suffering. It showed the rebels stationary still, in swarming lines, but scouts reported several thousand of them moving in a body from the flank toward the British rear.

"What proportion of the rebel force?" asked Byng. "New arrivals, or some of the old ones taking up a new position?"

"The same crowd, sir. They're just moving 'round to hem us in completely."

"So much the better for us, then! That leaves fewer for us to deal with in front."

As he spoke, another man came running to report the arrival of five gallopers, coming full pelt, one by one and scattered, with the evident purpose of allowing one man to get through whatever happened.

"That'll be relief at last!" said Byng Bahadur. And instead of ordering the advance immediately, he waited, scouring the skyline with his glasses.

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"Yes—dust—lance heads—one—two—three divisions, coming in a hurry."

Being on rising ground, he saw the distant relieving force much sooner than the rebels did, and he knew that it was help for him on the way some time before the first of the five gallopers careered into the camp, and shouted—

"Cunnigan Bahadur comes, with fifteen hundred!"

"Fifteen hundred," muttered Byng. "That merely serves to postpone the finish by an hour or two!"

But he waited, and presently the rebel scouts brought word, and their leaders, too, became aware of reënforcements on the way for somebody. They made the mistake, though, of refusing to believe that any help could be coming for the British, and by the time that messengers had hurried from the direction of the British rear, to tell of gallopers who had ridden past them and been swallowed by the shouting British lines, three squadrons on fresh horses were close enough to be reckoned dangerous.

"Is that a gun they've got with them?" wondered Byng. "By the Lord Harry, no—it's a coach and four! They're flogging it along like a twelve-pounder! And what the deuce is in those wagons?"

But he had no time for guesswork. The desultory thunder of the rebel ordnance ceased, and the whole mass that hemmed him in began to revolve within itself, and present a new front to the approaching cavalry.

"Caught on the hop, by Harry! The whole line will advance! Bugler!"

One bugle call blared out, and a dozen echoed it. In a second more a roar went up that is heard only on battlefields. It has none of the exultant shout of joy or of the rage that a mob throws up to heaven; it is not even anger, as the cities know it, or shout of the men who riot for advantage. It is a welcome ironically offered up to Death—full-throated, and more freighted with moral effect on an enemy than a dozen salvos of artillery.

The thousands ahead tried hard to turn again and face two attacks at once; but, though the units were efficiently controlled, there were none who could swing the whole. Byng's decimated, forward-rushing fragment of a mixed brigade, tight-reined and working like a piece of mechanism, struck home into a mass of men who writhed and fell away, and shouted to each other. A third of them was out of reach, beyond the British rear; fully another third was camped too far away to bring assistance at the first wild onslaught. Messengers were sent to bring them up, but the messengers were overtaken by a horde who ran.

Then, like arrows driven by the bows of death, three squadrons took them on the flank as Cunningham changed direction suddenly and loosed his full weight at the guns. Instead of standing and serving grape, the rebel gunners tried to get their ordnance away—facing about again too late, when the squadrons were almost on them. Then they died gamely, when gameness served no further purpose. The Rangars rode them down and butchered them, capturing every single gun and leaving them while they charged again at the rallying hordes ahead.

The strange assortment of horsed wagons and the lumbering four-horse coach took full advantage of the momentary confusion to make at a gallop for the British rear, where they drew up in line behind the Sikhs, who were volleying at short range in the center.

Byng detached two companies of British soldiers to do their amateur best with the guns, and for infantry they did good service with them. Fifteen or twenty minutes after the first onslaught the enemy was writhing under the withering attention of his own abandoned ordnance. But the odds were still tremendous, and the weight of numbers made the ultimate outcome of the battle seem a foregone conclusion.

From the British rear heads appeared above the rising ground. The deserted camp was rushed and set alight. The tents blazed like a beacon light, and a moment later the Goorkhas retaliated by setting fire to such of the rebel camp as had fallen into British hands.

IT was those two fires that saved the day. From the skyline to the rebel rear came the thunder of a salvo of artillery. It was the short bark of twelve-pounders loaded up with blank—a signal; and the rebels did not wait to see whether this were friend or foe. Help from one unexpected source had reached the British; this, they argued, was probably another column moving to the relief, and

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they drew off in reasonably decent order, harried, pestered, stung as they attempted to recover camp equipment or get away with stores and wagons, by Cunningham, Alwa, and Mohammed Gunga.

In another hour the rebel army was a black swarm spreading on the eastern skyline, and on the far horizon to the north there shone the glint of bayonets and helmet spikes, the dancing gleam of lance tips, and the dazzle from the long, polished bodies of a dozen guns. A galloper spurred up with a message for Byng.

You are to join my command for a raid in force on Howrah, where the rebels are supposed to have been concentrating for months past. The idea is to paralyze the vitals of the movement before concentrating somewhere on the road to Delhi, where the rebels are sure to make a most determined stand. EVANS.

As he read it, Mohammed Gunga galloped up to him, grinning like a boy.

"Cunnigan sahib's respects, General sahib! He asks leave to call his men off, saying that he has done all the damage possible with only fifteen hundred."

"Yes. Call 'em off, and send Cunningham to me. How did he shape?"

"Like a son of Cunnigan Bahadur! General sahib—salaam!"

"No! Here, you old ruffian—shake hands, will you! Now send Cunningham to me."

Cunningham came up fifteen minutes later with a Rangar orderly behind him, and did his best to salute as if it were nothing more than an ordinary meeting.

"Oh! Here you are. 'Gratulate you, Cunningham! You came in the nick of time. What kept you?"

"That 'ud take a long time to tell, sir. I've fifteen hundred horses a out t miles from here, sir, left in charge of native levies, and I'd like permission to go and fetch them before the levies make off with them."

"Splendid! Yes, you'd better go for them. What's in the wagons?"

"The Howrah treasure, sir."

"What?"

"The whole of the Howrah treasure, sir. It's held as security. Howrah guarantees to keep the peace and protect the homes of my men. I guaranteed to hand him back the treasure when the show's over, less deductions for damage done."

"Well, I'm—— Who thought of that? You or Mohammed Gunga?"

"Oh, I expect we cooked it up between us, sir."

"Hr-rrr-umph! And what's in the four-horse coach?"

"A lady and her father."

"The deuce they are!"

Byng rode up to the lumbering vehicle, signing to Cunningham to follow him.

"General Byng," said Cunningham. "Miss McClean, sir."

A very much disheveled and very weary-looking young woman, with a wealth of chestnut hair, leaned through the window and smiled, not at the General but at Cunningham. Byng stared, looked from one to the other of them, and said, "Hr-rrr-umph!" again.

"It was she who made the whole thing possible, sir."

"The very deuce it was!"

It began to be evident that Byng was not a ladies' man!

"This is Mr. McClean, sir—Rosemary's father. He helped her put the whole scheme through."

Byng nodded to the missionary and looked back at Rosemary McClean; then from her to Cunningham again.

"Hu-rrrr-umph! Christian names already! More congratulations, eh?"

Rosemary's head and shoulders disappeared, and Cunningham looked foolish.

"Well! Send Mohammed Gunga for the horses. Ride over there to where you see General Evans's column, and tell him the whole story. Take a small escort and the treasure with you. And—ah—er—lemme see—take this carriage too. Oh, by the bye—you'd better ask General Evans to make some arrangements for Miss McClean. Leave her over there with the treasure. I want you back with my brigade, and I want you to be some sort of use. Can't have love-making with the brigade, Mr. Cunningham!"

The Brigadier rode off with a rather perfunctory salute.

"Isn't he a rather curmudgeony sort of officer?" asked Rosemary, the moment that his back was turned.

"Oh, no!" laughed Cunningham. "That's Byng Bahadur's little way, that's all. He's quite likely to insist on being best man, or something of that sort, when the show's all over! Wait here, while I fetch the escort."

THE END

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TWO TALL TALES OF FOOTBALL

By Robert Johnston

YOU looked at me so dubiously after that last story that I've sometimes thought you did not believe it," said the pigskin artist, as he helped himself to a little more soda.

I assured him that nothing but his sacred word that it was a lie could possibly make me question it, and passed the cigars.

"It's Gospel truth, every word, and if Bill were here he would tell you the same story and could show you the ball to prove it, too. But if you think that was a doubtful story, what do you say to this?

FOOTBALL À LA FRANCAISE

YOU know I told you I had played football in queer places? Well, I played in France one year. Nothing so very queer about that, of course, but the brand of French football I sampled was queer, and don't you forget it.

I had been to Paris for the Nineteen Hundred Exposition and was strapped. There I was, dead broke, with no friends, and three thousand miles from a lemon. I fell in with a Yale chap named Tom Damon, who had come over on a cattle steamer, and was in just about the same fix that I was. We held a consultation in a café with our last five francs, and finally decided to tramp to Italy. So Damon traded his watch for some provisions, and we started the next morning.

We hadn't gone more than two days' journey, twenty parasangs, when we came to a mighty nice little town called Ramée. There was a boys' boarding-school there, founded by a rich old fellow named Sylvester who had gone daffy over Frœbel's theories of education. He had made this school and was running it himself. As he paid the bills, nobody dared object to his methods, and quite a number of people believed in him and sent their boys there.

He was a funny old chap. Why, one time—— But that's another story, as Kipling would say, and I was going to tell you about football. That's one trouble with me. When I get talking everything seems to remind me of something else, and I get off on a tangent. Poor habit for a lawyer, too. I guess conducting court cases is not my strong point, anyway.

To resume, Damon met this old chap and got into his good graces. As a result he was engaged as physical director, and I was hired as his assistant. We had some great times there. But to make a long story short, we taught those boys the noble game of football. It was in disguise, though, and its friends would never have known it. They ought to get Damon and me on the committee to revise the rules. We could do it, all right.

You see, they were a slim sort of a crowd there, and we saw right off they were never built for line-bucking or stopping Deland wedges. So we remodeled the game a little.

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We did about the same trick to it that Luther Burbank does with fruits. And when we crossed it with parlor croquet and checkers, we had a combination that made the forward pass game look like a cavalry charge. We used to have eight or ten balls at first, covered with different colored cloth, and changed them every ten minutes, according to old Sylvester's direction, so as not to tire their eyes.

Our greatest trouble was in getting school spirit; that is, after we worked the old gentleman round to trust us to run the game without interference. You see, we had to play two teams from the school, for nobody else around there knew any football.

Tom saw something had to be done to save the game, so he made a few missionary trips to a near-by public school. I guess Tom was born lucky. He struck a young Italian who was teaching in the next town, and this boy took to football as a duck takes to water. He absorbed the theory of the game inside of ten minutes, when Tom brought him over to see our practise. And one point stuck in his crop early and never got out, I guess, and that was that the prime object of the game was to get the ball over the other fellows' goal line.

He promptly got up a team and played us. We beat them; but it wasn't three weeks before that young chap had taught his crowd all the "football" our boys knew, and had us guessing to solve his plays. Our boys improved a good deal, too. But that young Italian was a strategist, and could work out an attack that was mighty hard to stop. Tom used to get wild at some of the dinky plays they pulled off on us for gains, and fairly had to hold himself to keep from going in. For a good hard-tackling college half or tackle could have ripped through and dumped everything before it started. Anyway, it was a great game, trying to meet the tricks of young Napoli's boys.

I pretty nearly had him discouraged when I dug up one of our boys who was a mind reader, and got him playing quarterback. He piped off the play to our fellows before it started, and we smeared a lot of good tricks. And Napoli was as mad as a hatter to see the ball nailed, no matter how he mixed the play. But he came back at us all right, and don't you forget it.

Old man Sylvester had become quite enthusiastic over the game, and had offered a prize of a trip to London for the team that would win the next match. The old fellow meant to take both teams all the time. But he didn't let on about that, except to the transportation company's man.

We all worked hard getting ready for that game. Tom's boys were fit as fiddles, and just about as fragile; confident, and chock-full of fancy plays it would make you dizzy to watch.

The old gentleman liked to referee, and he was as impartial as Solomon. Measured everything to a centimeter, and had the rules down fine.

The boys were a pretty spry lot, if they were slim. And we had one play where they formed a snap-the-whip and shot a man around the end like a piece of mud from a carriage wheel, that we thought would knock them, only we didn't like to use it except in a tight place; for it would probably hurt some one.

Well, the game started. It was first one way, and then the other. They had a better attack; but we were stronger on defense. And then our mind reader helped a lot, too. But they found a way to fool him by putting in a new halfback who had never learned the signals. So when a play was called out, everybody on the team thought just where it was to go, except this half. And when he got the ball he went where he pleased, and made some long gains, too.

The score was about even, and six minutes to play. They were 21, and we were 17. But we had just held them for downs, and had the ball on their fifteen-yard line. Tom did not have to coach our team, for the quarter kept track of his mind. So now he gave the signal for the snap-the-whip play. Our right half shot around the end, struck the man in the backfield full in the stomach, bowled him over and rolled across the line for a touchdown.

We failed the goal. But we were two points ahead, and only a few minutes more to play. Our score was 23. Don't forget that. For it meant something. I saw Tom look astonished, and our quarterback nearly threw a fit in his excitement, when they put in a new fullback. For he was the queerest looking thing I ever saw on a field.

He had on a big leather girdle and a thing that looked like a fire extinguisher strapped to the small of his back. His

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chest was all padded out, and from his shoulders projected two things that looked like closed umbrellas.

Our quarter started to yell something to Tom; but before he could say it, that new fullback dropped back about twenty yards and the signal was given. He got the ball on a long pass, and started for the line on the dead run. He chugged like an auto, and the things on his shoulders began to flop, and before we knew what was up, he was. He soared over our line, described a very handsome parabola, and dropped gently to earth between our goal posts.

They kicked a goal and that gave them a score of 28, and the game. For time was up and we had only our 23.

Tom gave that young Italian chap a dinner in London when we went there. For he said it was the only time he remembered that he was outplayed and outgeneraled, and that he bore no grudge against the man who did it so completely.

Young Napoli is with Count Zeppelin now.

THE MOUNTED ELEVEN

I KNEW you'd buck when I cinched on that French yarn. But that's just as true as that story; in fact it deserves a label "made in France." By the way, I hope you noticed my Western metaphor?

You see, I was out West three years ago, and I sometimes fall into plains parlance unconsciously. Speaking of the great West reminds me of a game we had out in—— What's that? Oh, sit down. If this story wasn't absolutely true, I wouldn't tell it to you. Besides, I'll get through before eleven o'clock, if that's what's bothering you.

It was this way: Three years ago I met a fellow at Cambridge who had a Chinese servant. And this Chinaman stood in with the Chinamen in Exeter Place. So after the Hip Sing Tongs had shot up the Boston Tongs, and the bodies of the deceased were interred under the direction of the Chinese Masons, I had a chance to attend the services. One of the prominent Chinese wanted my friend to go out to a place called Lottaberg, in New Mexico, to do some legal work connected with the settlement of property of the dead men.

He couldn't go, but finally arranged that I should do the business. When I got to Lottaberg, I found that the parties whose signatures I was to secure had gone off on a prospecting expedition, destination unknown, and were not expected back for two months. So I concluded to sit tight and wait for them to come back.

Now, I don't know enough to keep my mouth shut. I always get into trouble telling all I know, and I did there. In a moment of confidential enthusiasm, superinduced by a certain form of Lottaberg hospitality, I confessed to a jovial cowpuncher, under the seal of strict secrecy, that I knew something about football.

In less than ten seconds I was engaged as coach of the Lottaberg Corner Football Team, with orders to get busy at once.

That was about ten A. M., and at two P. M. I had a bunch of eighteen untamed sons of the plains lined up offering me advice.

I've coached teams before; but I never coached a team like that. In the first place, they arrived on horseback, and refused to dismount to receive instructions. Said if they couldn't get on to the idea on horseback, it wasn't their kind of a game. So I went ahead.

A mounted eleven! Whee! That was going some, right off the reel! And of all the rough-house times you ever saw, this was the main ring performance. I have often complained that it was hard to get dash and vim into teams, especially young teams. Have to rouse 'em up to concert pitch before they go in hard enough.

But this gang! Heavens! They had the charge of the Light Brigade skun a mile! When the left half, behind a six-man-and-horse interference, circled the end, it sounded like a San Francisco earthquake!

When it came to tackling, I was clean stumped. But my friend Cactus Bill settled that for me, the first time I inaugurated the defense idea, by neatly lassoing the man with the ball and dragging him back, pony and all, about twenty yards.

I saw I was in beyond my depth. But the only thing to do was to keep a stiff upper lip and strike out for shore. But it looked to me like a rocky shore and a long way off.

As soon as that crowd got the idea of the game, all I had to do was stand by and represent the audience. They at once issued an invitation to the Turtle Dove outfit, of Luna Center, to come over and get licked at football. To which challenge

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came back the brief but pointed inquiry, "What the —— is football?"

Tom Murphy was delegated to explain the features of the game to the Turtle Doves, and in less than thirty minutes after his arrival at Luna Center, was told to "get the —— home and telegraph for doctors."

They scorned coaching, training, or preliminary practise. All they needed was the idea. They did the rest.

Among other improvements on the game as conducted in the conservative East, they made the field half a mile long and a quarter of a mile wide. Said a fellow didn't have room according to his size on a little dinky art square like I described.

September fourth was set as the date of the great match, Lottaberg *vs.* Luna Center. Fifteen-minute halves.

Sheriff Buck Saunders was chosen as referee, and they dispensed with other officials. Said linesmen and so on were all —— nonsense, as Buck was perfectly able to decide all matters of that kind. And if he wasn't, he was not fit to be Sheriff and ought to be showed up.

So they agreed that what Buck said went. And you bet it did. Buck came on the field with two forty-fours on his belt, and a double-barreled shotgun slung over his back. He called the players together and issued his orders. All firearms were to be deposited with him, and kickers on decisions were to be shot. That was all.

Before this Buck and I and the two Captains had a conference, and I explained the rules, or rather one or two that I thought would be useful. They did agree to dismount to kick a goal, if a touchdown was made.

Dispensing with further preliminaries, they started the game. And they started it with a rush. All the Turtle Doves were drawn up at one end of the field; Lottaberg at the other. Buck held the ball in the center and fired a shot to start the race for it.

Old Tom Piper had the best sprinting-pony, and beat the gun enough on the start to reach the ball an easy first. He took it from Buck and sailed straight through the charging line of the Turtle Doves before you could say Jack Robinson. The Doves wheeled their ponies and tore after him; but they might as well have chased a human bullet. Old Tom's cayuse was over the line and snorting under the cross-bars before they were within roping distance.

There was a wrangle as to who should kick the goal, but finally Captain Al Jones was allowed to try. He made an ignominious failure and was jeered into profane desuetude as a kicker.

Luna had the ball then, and formed a V. Our boys stopped the V; but it cost Gunny Peters a broken leg, and put two broncbos out of commission.

The blood of both teams was now up, and willing substitutes were quickly drawn from the crowd of enthusiastic rooters on the side lines. Luna still kept the ball and tried a long, circling dash. Cactus Bill made a great throw with his rope, and we got the ball on a fumble. Bill was thrown in his attempt to gain, and it was nip and tuck for the next ten minutes. Then a Dove broke through for a long gain, and one more rush put it over our line.

To the surprise of the crowd, and to Al Jones's audible disgust, Long Jake Evans kicked a beauty goal; and the Turtle Dove outfit on the lines fired several jubilant volleys.

The audience now saw the possibilities of that little matter of goal-kicking, and strange to say, regarded that as the most wonderful thing of all. Long Jake was a hero, and was treated eleven times during the intermission. Bets waxed high and frequent, for by this time a crowd of over a hundred had collected. They followed the play along the sides and encouraged their favorites by shots, shouts and yells.

Soon after the opening of the second half, we worked a crisscross and scored another clean touchdown. Mike Peever allowed he would kick this goal, and quieted all opposition from his team mates by agreeing to stand the drinks all round if he didn't kick the —— thing plumb over the center of that there stick. He placed the ball very carefully, squinted in a most knowing way along the top of it, and nearly paralyzed our team by doing exactly as he had boasted —kicking it plumb over the center!

That put us six to the good; and a lot more money was staked.

Now Luna made frantic efforts to break our line. They charged and spurred and cursed, and of all the wild *mêlées* I ever saw, this was the worst. Men were hurt on almost every play and horses were fast increasing in value. The whole crowd was wild. Our boys on the lines were flourishing all kinds of money, swearing we could

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at our weight in tigers, and lick all ——.

But they failed to reckon on little Sandy Miggs. Sandy was about five feet high when he walked—which was seldom—but he was all there just the same. This game had roused all the wild Scotch in him, and he was tearing back and forth like a devil incarnate. He rode a red-eyed roan that seemed part of him, and a match for his own devilish spirit in recklessness.

Old Tom got the ball again and started straight ahead for the line with a clear field. But as luck would have it, he dropped the ball in full career. It bounded straight up in the air just as Sandy Miggs came tearing along whirling his lariat like a wild man. Sandy saw it, and swooped like a hawk in his flight. He nailed that ball in the air and was off at an angle across the field on his red-eyed devil of a horse.

Al Jones raced straight down to cut him off, and got within a few yards as he went by. Al was pretty sore about that foozled kick, and when he lassoed Sandy's pony, I tell you he settled back vicious to snub him; and the red-eyed roan was stretched flat with a broken neck one second later.

But Sandy kept on going. When he saw the lariat settle, he kicked his feet free and fell clear of the horse with the ball in his arms. He was about twenty yards from the line when he got his feet under him, and those bow legs of his moved so fast he looked like a red-headed spider.

Old Tom roped him just as he got over the line, and dragged him back, kicking and swearing, a good forty yards before order was restored by Buck, who declared that he had been over the line, and was to have credit for a touchdown. The crowd went clean crazy then, for Buck said the score was a tie.

Our crowd, that had wagered their shirts we could not be beaten, were plumb anxious about that goal; and I tell you everybody held his breath when Long Jake set the ball for a kick.

It was a long kick and at a hard angle, and he made a mighty pretty try for it.

The ball sailed high, and was carrying apparently true. The Turtle Doves broke into a triumphant yell, but choked it off short, for the ball never reached the goal.

In fact, it never reached anywhere; for when our boys on the side lines saw that it was likely to go over, instinct did the rest, and the Doves' yell of triumph was drowned in a crashing volley. For with one accord our boys drew and blazed away at the sailing pigskin.

Did they hit it? Say, that crowd had practised for the last six years shooting at tin cans thrown in the air while they were on the dead gallop; and a mark like a football from solid footing was a cinch. The ball was a pig's bladder covered with saddle leather, and when those few pounds of lead met it, it went off like a section of July Fourth. It was just shot all to pieces, and the wreck came down like a dead bat, ten feet in front of the goal.

There was a great row over it, and Buck Saunders had to shoot four men to restore order, and a lot of others got shot promiscuous-like while he was doing it. I didn't wait to see the finish. I left when that ball collapsed in the air, and learned the particulars by mail a few weeks later.

My business? Oh, yes. I came near forgetting about that. I did, until I got a letter from Buck three weeks later. That gang of prospectors got in about the middle of the second half and the parties whose signatures I was after were among those accidently shot in the mix-up.

My report to the Chinese Tong in Boston made no mention of football.

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THE CHANG-HWA PEARL

By

H·D·Couzens

THE Greatest Man in China took a sip of tea from a tiny bowl as dainty and frail as the half of an eggshell. The bouquet of the tea filled the room like the perfume of flowers.

"I think you will find no obstacles, Captain."

His voice was pleasing; he spoke in his own tongue with occasional interpolations in English, a language of which he was supposed to be ignorant.

"You will take the pearl to England and place it in the hands of Sir Philip, who will be informed of the gift by a despatch sent through the mail. Your steamer will arrive in three days and leaves at midnight."

The Minister held in his hand an exquisitely inlaid and filigreed jewel case. He pressed a spring and the case flew open, disclosing a pearl of the bigness of a Hamburg grape. It was a rich, lustrous pink in color. Upon it was a curious splotch of red as if it had been smeared by the quick touch of a bloody finger, though the spot was actually a part of the nacreous substance, an unaccountable freak of nature.

Captain Adrian Atkinson took the gem and studied it with care. The Minister watched him keenly. Few men had ever looked at that pearl without a gleam of cupidity in their eyes. But the Captain, having satisfied his interest, placed it back in the case with the simple remark—

"Odd thing, isn't it?"

"Very," said the Minister dryly. "In fact, it is not only odd but unique. There is no other pearl in the world so marked; and, as people value such things by their rarity, it is beyond price. There are men here in China who would pay an immense fortune to possess it. I presume you know something of the history of the Chang-Hwa Pearl?"

"Not I," replied the Captain. "I don't care a jot for the bally things. Sir Philip, I think, is daft over them."

"The Chang-Hwa Pearl, as it is called, was found during a local war in the reign of Chang Hwa, three centuries ago. In one of the forays a fleeing man was cut down by a Manchu warrior. The man was carrying a bundle which proved to be a dead baby, richly dressed and ornamented, and as the warrior stooped over his victim the infant's tiny hand opened and this pearl rolled out. The Manchu tried to wipe off the bloody stain; and, finding it indelible, was overcome with superstitious fear and took the pearl to his commander. In the fire and pillage all opportunity of identifying the dead baby or the man who carried it was lost, and no previous history of the Pearl ever came to light.

"It eventually passed into the royal treasury, where it has since remained. It has been worn only at coronations, has achieved no notoriety as great jewels have a way of doing, and is considered a luck charm as well as an emblem of prosperity. There is, however, one interesting tradition——"

"Oh, bother the traditions!"

The Captain spoke impatiently, but seeing

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the reproachful expression on the Minister's face, said:

"Beg pardon, your Excellency! Pray go on!"

"The tradition is that he who tries to steal the Chang-Hwa Pearl will die in the attempt. History confirms this. Seven men have tried to steal it and all died swiftly before they could make away with it. As you suggest, this is not particularly interesting; but I wish, Captain, to call your attention to this case."

The Minister, with apparent irrelevance, tapped the jewel case with a lean forefinger.

"It was especially made when the pearl came into possession of His Majesty Chang Hwa, and has held it ever since. You see this spring on the front? It is there, in plain sight, where a spring should be, and you would naturally press it to open the case. You must never press that spring." The Minister's eyes gleamed as he leaned across the table. "As you value your life, Captain—your life!—you are not to press that spring. The real spring is here."

He took the Captain's hand and pressed his finger on a certain spot in the filigree work at the back of the case.

Adrian worked the true catch several times; then tossed it on the table.

"All right. I have it!" said he. "But what would occur if I *did* press the wrong catch?"

"I believe it is your business to take and execute orders," said the Minister tartly, "not to ask questions."

"Right! 'Mine but to do and die!' Proceed with the orders, your Excellency!"

"No one knows that the Pearl is going to Sir Philip save the Empress, you and myself. I do not believe, as I have said, that there will be any impediments, but secrets become known, especially in the present state of unrest, and you will, of course, take your own precautions.

"Come here, by the private entrance, an hour before the steamer sails and the Pearl will be delivered to you. Six men of the Imperial Secret Service will follow you unseen to the steamer. From then forward you will require no protection other than your own resource and courage, which—" the Minister bowed gravely—"we have always found infallible."

"I thank your Excellency. Good night, sir!"

"Good night!"

The Minister extended his hand. "And, Captain—as a final reminder! Beware of that false spring!"

ON LEAVING the Minister's house the Captain lit a cigar and strolled about for a time, his brow wrinkled in thought. Although he had no interest in jewels himself, he knew the lust that such things inspired. If the secret remained with the Empress, the Minister and himself, his task was a simple one. If not, the complications would be serious and interesting. In spite of himself he felt a strong premonition that the secret would leak out. And he was well aware that there were many men who would cheerfully murder him in order to obtain possession of the Chang-Hwa Pearl.

After half an hour of strolling he found himself in a maze of mean, foul-smelling little streets and alleys, lined with small shops and unclean tea houses. He picked his way to a slightly broader and less maculate thoroughfare and paused before a dark shop through whose dingy window could be seen a display of varnished pig, dried ducks, water-nuts and mushrooms, mingling democratically with lacquered stools, boxes and other wares of the cheapest kind. At his second knock there was the sound of a loud, animal yawn within, the padding of straw sandals and a gabbled question. He responded in Chinese and the door was cautiously opened by a fat, sleepy Chinaman.

The shop was stuffy with the sickish Oriental odor. The fat Chinese led the way to a door at the rear; then through a long, narrow passage to another door, behind which was a heavy curtain. This he held aside and Captain Atkinson passed into a large, well lighted room, high-ceiled and furnished with astonishing richness.

Heavy gold and silk embroideries and brocades hid the walls. Huge and hideous dragons writhed and squirmed about tall bronze vases, and exquisitely carved pedestals held wonderful cloisonné jars. There were cabinets of rarest porcelain, and on stools and tables scattered about, enticing articles of ivory, jade and inlay work. The air held the faint and agreeable perfume of tea leaves and spices.

At a desk in a corner of the room a Chinaman, in purple brocade, sat peering through a large microscope, a litter of slides

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and paraphernalia about him. His face had something of the ruddy glow of a healthy Anglo-Saxon and he appeared young, though Orientals, born oppressed with the weight of ages, are never young.

Quong Lee was an Oxford graduate and an athlete; also a man deep in the intrigue of local affairs. He dealt in everything under the sun. In his outer shop you might buy a package of punk sticks for a couple of cash; in the inner one negotiate the purchase of a Province. There were jades, porcelains and pearls to fit all purses; also a great variety of beautiful "fish-pearl" imitations, in which there was a thriving trade with tourists. And in his business dealings Quong Lee was known to be honest to the finest scruple.

"Ah, Quong," said Captain Atkinson, "at your favorite hobby, I see."

"Good evening, Captain. Yes, the microscope interests me. It is the greatest factor in the world's progress just at present. I've just received a new stain—carbol fuchsin, it is called; the invention of a German scientist. It has revolutionized the preparation of certain slides. Would you care to see it?"

"No, thanks. Don't understand the blooming thing in the least; and I've something else on hand, Quong. Tell me, have you ever, by any chance, seen the gem called the—ah—the Chang-Hwa Pearl?"

"Twice."

Quong Lee produced a gold cigarette case from his voluminous sleeve, tendered the Captain a Turkish cigarette and lit one himself. "Pray continue, Captain!"

II

ADRIAN ATKINSON had been a subaltern in the British Army till, in an obscure campaign in the Hills, a bullet from a stolen Snider in the hands of a lone "sniper" had whined by obliquely and in passing flicked at one of his eyes, destroying its usefulness forever. The wound was otherwise slight and healed perfectly. It was an inglorious affair, but it ruined Adrian's career in the Army and he was retired with the rank of Captain.

He found himself with no desire for "Home," for he had no near relatives and very little money. He was highly sensitive regarding his disfigurement, which he concealed as well as possible with an artificial eye, and, to obviate its disconcerting glare, a pair of glasses, one lens of which was slightly "smoked." This rendered the defect scarcely noticeable, but Captain Atkinson fancied himself a thing of ugliness.

It was his sensitive point, and as he brooded over it, believing he would inspire repulsion at Home, he determined to seek some field for his services in the Far East. He was, therefore, greatly pleased at receiving an offer of employment from the man whom, next to "Little Bobs," he most admired.

Sir Philip Dart had spent a lifetime in China. A wise, able and astute politician, he was a man born to direct great affairs, and in China had found his field. He loved the country and its people, an important factor in his ultimate success. He lived and dressed in Chinese fashion and had a profound knowledge of the Chinese language and dialects.

He became adviser to the Inner Council, one of the few white men ever wholly trusted by an Oriental nation, holding their entire confidence and respect. He was, in fact, the one man who stood as a buffer for many years between China and the nations of Europe.

Captain Atkinson was a distant relative, of whose conduct Sir Philip had taken notice from time to time, and when the young man's Army career was cut short, he chanced to find himself in need of an assistant who was both brave and discreet. He used Adrian, at first as a kind of undersecretary and bearer of messages of minor importance, until he proved himself worthy of greater trust.

In a few years Adrian was his chief confidant. He was entrusted with the most important despatches and treaties, and on every occasion proved that his employer had chosen well. He was neither wise, deep nor shrewd in the political sense: but he was capable, steadfast, fairly intelligent, courageous to a degree and altogether reliable—qualifications which made him invaluable to Sir Philip.

Adrian had been with him ten years when Sir Philip, after forty years of honorable service, decided to retire and pass his declining years in the land of his birth. His services had been liberally, indeed lavishly, rewarded, and be returned to England a rich man. Yet he departed from China

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leaving the thing his heart most desired—the Chang-Hwa Pearl.

He was a collector and connoisseur of rare gems, with a special fondness for pearls because of their marked individuality. He had often seen the Chang-Hwa Pearl and, in so far as a true and lofty-minded gentleman may do so, had coveted it. In his own way he worshiped its tender, lustrous beauty; yet he had never, by so much as a word, expressed a desire to possess it. Men have gone to the greatest lengths to gain such a treasure, but they were not such men as Sir Philip Dart. And the wise Minister, who was the Greatest Man in China, knew of Sir Philip's desire.

Sir Philip bore a commission to England. His official retirement was not to occur till he had met and conferred with a few great men over secret affairs of the gravest importance to China, and so great were his services to the Chinese nation in the fulfilment of this last act of trust that the wise Minister—remembered. There was but one adequate reward—the Chang-Hwa Pearl; and Captain Atkinson, who had been retained as a secret agent of the ministry, was selected to deliver the gem to his late employer.

III

THERE were few passengers on the *Orient Queen*, for it was not the tourist season. This pleased Captain Atkinson, who disliked crowded steamers with their surplus of garrulous or sentimental women. He was never an affable companion when traveling, dividing his time between the smoking-room and a lone deck chair with a novel and a pipe.

Among the brilliant *raconteurs* of the smoking-room he was conceded to be dull. His fund of anecdote was limited and his sense of humor somewhat blunted; yet his few brief stories were never pointless, and his questions, when he became interested in discussion, were keenly apt and to the point.

He found himself seated near the Captain of the steamer, an old acquaintance. Across the table, a few seats removed, was a short, slight, weather-brown man with a sunburned beard and shrewd, twinkling eyes. When, at their first meal together, the table was partially cleared, he glanced at Adrian with a smile.

"Captain Atkinson, I believe?" said he, producing a card. Adrian read:

SIR HUBERT MACKINTOSH, F. R. G. S.

"Saw your name on the passenger list," continued Sir Hubert, "and was pleased to find we were at the same table. I have heard of you, Captain."

"And I of you, Sir Hubert," returned Adrian warmly, "and read your charming book."

Sir Hubert chuckled.

"I believe I'm best known in places off the line of travel; I'm lost among my own kind. But you, sir, are one of the few active Englishmen in China. The Orient is becoming the loafing-ground of expatriated idlers."

Both voice and manner were most engaging, and Adrian felt a liking for the man at once. In the smoking-room they fell into talk. Sir Hubert Mackintosh had achieved some celebrity as an explorer and soldier of fortune, and his recent book was a rare contribution to the world's knowledge of ethnology. He proved to be an interesting companion, with a great deal of charm and a keen, strong insight into the heart of life. He had, moreover, that suggestion of reserve force that stamps the man who has done things.

Among others who frequented the smoking-room was a tall, thin, yellow man dressed in immaculate flannel who had evidently been long in China, for he seemed well informed on Oriental topics. His name was Eugene P. Tallboys, and in a corner of his card was inscribed, in minute letters, "British Consular Service." His tales of Shanghai and the Coast cities were inclined to be sardonic. His thin lips twitched nervously as he talked, with an expression that habitually suggested a sneer.

He played cards a great deal, occasionally a bitterly contested game with a half-caste Chinese named Charlie Chong. Both men, Adrian noticed, were expert players, though the half-caste, with his unruffled placidity, invariably had a shade the better of his opponent.

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Sir Hubert Mackintosh knew the pair.

"Tallboys," he frankly confided, "is a bad egg. Came out as a remittance man, was fired from the Consular Service for selling secrets, though he still claims a connection, and his principal business is smuggling opium to Hawaii. He's probably on his way now to make a deal in the stuff."

"How about this half-caste, Chong?" queried Adrian. "Are they in together?"

"I hardly think so. Chong, for all his Chinese blood, is head and ears above Tallboys. He's known as a pearl buyer and has engineered some big deals. He is the chap who made the big raid on the Japanese pearlers last year at Thursday Island—you must have heard of that. His business is a bit queer, but it's big business and he's never been caught in anything crooked. Charlie's a good sport."

The rest of the smoking-room coterie was the usual run of passengers found on China boats—tourists and round-the-world-in-a-hurry excursionists; a naval officer or so on sick leave; loud-voiced drummers for phonographs and dollar watches, and quiet ones who sold bridges and trolley systems; astute buyers of Oriental goods and a few missionaries who dropped in occasionally, seemingly to disapprove of smoking-room practises in general. One of these, who smoked a pipe continually and seemed to be afflicted with tuberculosis, had a most irritating way of whistling softly through his teeth as he watched the card players—always the same tune, "Ben Lomond."

Adrian watched all these covertly and listened to their talk, endeavoring to discover who, aboard the *Orient Queen*, were his enemies. For enemies there were without a doubt, with every sense alert to steal the Chang-Hwa Pearl. He received a demonstration on the third day at sea.

He had slipped off the heavy boots he had been wearing for a pair of rubber-soled shoes; left his stateroom, carefully locking the door after him, and taken his regular afternoon "constitutional"—thirty times around the main deck. In the smoking-room afterward, he had found Sir Hubert, who entertained him with a protracted, though interesting, account of a hunt for Siberian tigers.

Adrian had himself hunted these rare beasts, and their talk grew intimate till it was interrupted by the first dinner gong, which sent Adrian in haste to his room. Seasoned traveler as he was, he never relinquished, except in extreme necessity, the Briton's inalienable right to don dinner dress before the evening meal.

His door was locked as he had left it. He sat on the transom berth to undress, when his foot kicked the boots he had exchanged for yachting shoes. He picked them up and set them out of the way. Then a sudden thought struck him. The boots were not where he had left them. Adrian was very precise and fastidious over small matters of dress, and he remembered having placed the boots under the lower end of the transom; yet here they were, kicking about under his feet!

He picked them up and looked them over. In each heel two holes were neatly bored with a small awl or gimlet! His other shoes had been similarly treated, and his fastidious sense informed him, after an examination, that his bags and steamer trunk had been carefully overhauled. Adrian smiled as he proceeded with his dressing.

"Well," he muttered, "they've begun. But it's still their move!"

A FEW nights later he sat in a game of bridge with Sir Hubert Mackintosh as partner, playing against a drummer for electric supplies and an old Army chaplain who was returning home, retired. They played till eleven, when the lights were extinguished. Afterward, the drummer and chaplain having retired, Adrian and Sir Hubert took several turns about the deck, smoking and talking till close to midnight.

Adrian had a stateroom to himself, between decks. By arrangement with the steward he kept the door locked, though he felt it to be a useless precaution; and he slept with his revolver strapped to his wrist. Sitting on the edge of his berth he stripped to the waist.

Resting against his left pectoral muscle, close under the arm, and held in place by a strap over his shoulder and another around his body, was a pocket of soft, pliable leather. From this he took the inlaid jewel case of the Chang-Hwa Pearl, snapped it open for a moment, exposing the gem within, then closed and replaced it.

He was reaching for the tunic of his pajamas when he caught something out of the tail of his good eye that caused a slight chill to play up and down his naked back. His

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port light was open. It was in the sheer side of the ship, a good thirty feet above the water, yet through it a face was peering at him!

Adrian did not start or look toward the port. Whistling softly, he calmly finished his preparations for the night, bathed his face and hands, turned off the light and rolled into his berth. Through the open port he could see the moonlit sky unobstructed. There was nothing there now. Yet some one had been there—some one who had descended by a rope or sling from the deck above to spy on him. It had given him a bad turn for a moment, but as he composed himself for sleep his pulse was normal and his nerves under excellent control.

"The beggars know where I carry it now," he murmured. "If they'd been patient, I'd have shown them myself. It's still their move; probably the next means trouble!"

IV

IT WAS eight o'clock at night when the ship docked at Honolulu. She was to sail early in the morning, and most of the through passengers, eager to attend the band concert and dance at the hotel or drive to the beach, soon left the ship. The Captain and officers, save those on watch, also went ashore.

Adrian, stretched out in a steamer chair, smoking a cigar, could hear the strains of Berger's Band up at the hotel, strangely attuned with the monotone of the surf at the rim of the reef. The solemn mystery of moonlight was over the island and in the soft breath of the trade-wind were the blended odors of inland flowers and the salt, sweetly aromatic seaweed on the beach.

Adrian preferred to remain aboard. He believed that an attempt would be made to rob him of the Pearl when the ship was close to San Francisco, where the thieves could easily lose themselves, but it might occur at any time and he felt that he was taking fewer chances by staying aboard the ship. He knew that he was watched.

Once he started below to get something from his stateroom. As he turned in at the door of the saloon he looked back and fancied he saw a shadow creeping along the deserted deck. Instead of going below, he crossed the saloon to the other side of the ship. He had an uncomfortable suspicion of a lurking some one in the dark stateroom and the possibility of a long knife slipped between his ribs.

As he emerged from the saloon he collided with Sir Hubert, who grasped his arm.

"Just going hunting for you, Captain. The steward said you were aboard. Come up to the smoker. They're entertaining a couple of queer chaps, friends of Charlie Chong's—a real Hawaiian Prince, one of the last of the Kamehamehas, and a sugar magnate. No end of money, both. Interesting chaps; come along!"

In the smoking-room they found the party in a state of mild hilarity. Champagne had been flowing freely. The Prince, a fat, brown man, with innumerable wreaths of carnations and *maile* about his head and shoulders, was ponderously executing some steps of the *hula* dance to shouts of applause. The merriment halted for a time, while Adrian was introduced to Prince Solomon Puaolani and Mr. Oscar Blades, the latter a sunbaked man with puttees and a riding-whip. There were half a dozen others in the party, including Tallboys and Charlie Chong. The sickly missionary sat at one side, gravely puffing at his pipe.

Adrian found himself seated in a corner behind a table, with Sir Hubert Mackintosh on his left. The steward appeared with more drinks. Prince Solomon deposited himself heavily in a chair, his moon face half buried in a mass of flowers. He fanned himself vigorously.

"I'm too fat to dance any more," said he, absorbing a glass of champagne in a single swallow. "Have you gentlemen ever seen a *hula?*"

He addressed himself to Adrian and Sir Hubert.

"I've seen the usual thing provided for tourists," replied Adrian. "They tell me it is a poor, pale substitute for the real *hula.*"

"I have heard the same," said Sir Hubert. "I should like to see the dance really well done. I believe it is a wonderfully intricate performance."

"It is," the Prince remarked enthusiastically, "and you shall see it. Come out to my place, gentlemen, all of you. I'll show you a *hula* that is a real thing."

"Time for that later on," said Tallboys. "There's a round of drinks coming."

The steward appeared with more champagne and a towering platter of sandwiches.

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Adrian took Scotch and soda in a tall glass. The party waxed more hilarious and the stories grew increasingly flagrant. Some of the weaker heads sought their berths. When the steward informed the rest that, because of the Captain's absence, the smoking-room lights must be extinguished at the usual time, there were left only Prince Puaolani, Blades, Tallboys, Chong, Sir Hubert and Adrian. The missionary had left the room, and Adrian could see him dimly through the window, pacing moodily up and down the deck.

Tallboys addressed himself to the Prince:

"Not much excitement left under the Provisional Government, is there, Prince? I imagine you princelets and other royal members are walking pretty small these days."

"No," said the Prince, engulfing a sandwich, "it isn't as it was under the monarchy. Now it's all sugar. These fellows—" he aimed an accusing thumb at Blades —"these sugar fellows have taken away our Queen and our Government and now they want to turn us over to the United States so their blasted sugar will be protected. It's all sugar, sugar, sugar! I'm sick of the sound of it."

"I notice you don't object to drawing down your dividends," said Blades, winking at the others.

"Dividends are all right—" the Prince spoke gloomily—"but there's nothing to spend 'em on under your missionary Government. We have to go to 'Frisco to get a run for our money."

"BUY some pearls, Prince!"

Charlie Chong, at the end of the table, was sitting in his favorite attitude, his chair tilted back, thumbs in the waistband of his trousers. He brought the chair down with a thump. Although he was half English, his smile, like his eyes, was Chinese.

"I'll sell you some that are A No. 1, first chop!"

The missionary, pacing the deck, began to whistle "Ben Lomond" softly. He seemed to be the only one about; but presently a quartermaster put his head in at the door, withdrew it and passed on to the bridge. Chong spread a handkerchief on the table, took a long "poke" of sharkskin from his pocket, and poured out a handful of pearls.

"Take your choice," he said, passing the handkerchief to the Prince.

Adrian could see that some of the pearls were very fine ones, but the Prince, after a brief inspection, waved them aside largely.

"Chicken feed," he murmured, apparently somewhat fuddled. "Who wants those dinky little things?"

Sir Hubert and the planter bent over the handkerchief with interest. The Prince, with a lazy and erratic sweep of his arm, picked up Adrian's tall glass and set it to one side.

"Cap'n, le' me fill you glass of champagne. Better than that stuff. Then we'll go my place an' see *hula*. What!"

Clamped by two fingers against the palm of the fat, brown hand which lifted the tumbler was an invisible something which may have been a small glass vial.

Adrian reclaimed his glass and recharged it.

"Thank you," said he. "I never drink anything but Scotch. Some of these pearls appear fine, Sir Hubert, though I'm no judge. That dusky one, there, ought to be worth at least a hundred pounds."

"It's worth three thousand dollars gold," said Chong quietly. "I have a better one, though. You wanted to see something startling, Solomon. Look here!"

He picked up the sharkskin poke. Again Adrian could hear the irritating strains of "Ben Lomond." Some one outside passed hurriedly forward. Chong held the bag in his hand for a time as if for effect, then tipped it forward; and there rolled out on the table a great, dove-colored "black pearl," round, soft and melting in its tender color and, to the untrained eye at least, without a flaw. Prince Solomon gasped. Sir Hubert, before whom the pearl had come to rest, bent forward eagerly.

"Wonderful!" he said, in a half whisper.

Adrian, who had finished his Scotch, appeared unaccountably drowsy. His eyelids were drooping and he sagged over the table.

"Yes, it is wonderful," said Charlie Chong in a slow, even voice. "I know of only one that is finer—and that is the Chang-Hwa Pearl."

"Th—the Chang-Hwa Pearl!"

Adrian straightened up quickly and stared at the speaker.

"Yes."

Chong was again tilted back easily in his chair.

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"The Chang-Hwa Pearl. Have you ever seen it, Captain?"

His voice was as soft as the purr of a cat. He surveyed Captain Atkinson with half-closed lids and a bland smile.

"Why—why, I may have—once or twice."

Adrian hiccoughed a trifle and seemed to keep his eyes open with an effort.

"To be sure! Of course! An' a fine pearl it is, too!"

He spoke thickly and swayed forward in his seat. There was a swift exchange of glances about the table. The missionary had ceased whistling and stood in the doorway, his back to the room.

Tallboys gave a sudden, short laugh, his thin lips twitching in a cold sneer.

"I know you've seen it, Captain; I had information to that effect in Peking. Stories will get around, you know. But you're among friends, Captain. Be sure of that!"

Captain Atkinson took another drink of Scotch. "Wh—what do you mean? What are you gettin' at?"

"I mean—" Tallboys had risen to his feet—"that you have with you the most remarkable pearl in the world and we are anxious to see it. We're all friends, as I said before. Captain, let us see the Chang-Hwa Pearl!"

The Hawaiian Prince had moved closer, a strange light in his small, heavy-lidded eyes. "What is this business—this Chang-Hwa Pearl? Yes, yes! Let us see it!"

Adrian looked from face to face, perplexed and flustered. Every eye was on him, eagerly, watchfully. "Show you the—the Chang-Hwa Pearl—the Chang-Hwa Pearl ——" he stammered.

Sir Hubert smiled at him in a friendly way and placed a reassuring hand on his knee. "No harm in it, old man, if you really have the thing," said he in a low voice. "I'd be glad of the treat, myself."

Adrian looked at him dreamily.

"All right, old chap, since you wish it. That confounded Scotch has gone to my head, but——"

He fumbled awkwardly in the fold of his shirt and in a moment drew from the hidden pocket the filigree jewel case.

"One look," said he with a reckless laugh. "Only one! These things make men deuced covetous!"

And he opened the case so that all could see the great gem within. Then he quickly snapped it shut, and his head fell forward limply on the table.

Prince Solomon made a clumsy catch at the case. Instantly Adrian was on his feet. His glasses had fallen off and his artificial eye glared at Solomon with a sinister stare.

"Hands off!" he cried. "You thief!"

He looked around wildly.

"Why, they're all thieves, Sir Hubert. I believe it's a plot——"

His revolver snapped harmlessly, as Charlie Chong leaped forward and threw himself on the hand that held the jewel case. Tallboys pinioned the other arm. His eye seemed to gleam more balefully.

"All right!" he cried. "You've got me, confound you! But that case! Look out for that. It's——"

Something struck him over the ear—something in the hand of Sir Hubert Mackintosh, so that he fell forward, inert and senseless, across the table. Almost as if on a signal the lights went out. A moment later six men filed down the gangplank and were lost in obscurity beyond the wharf.

WHEN Adrian awoke the late sun was streaming through the open port. His head ached amazingly. He rang for the room steward.

"Where are we?" he asked when the official appeared.

"A hundred miles out from 'Onolulu, sir. Are you feeling well, sir? May I bring you something? You were a—a bit ill, I fancy, last night, sir, from what the deck steward——"

"Quite likely," said Adrian dryly. "Steward, is Sir Hubert Mackintosh on deck?"

"No, sir. Left us at 'Onolulu, sir, quite unexpected. He was booked through."

"Ah! And that missionary chap. The tall one who smoked a pipe and whistled through his teeth. Is he aboard?"

"Mr. Capers, sir? No, sir. He left at 'Onolulu, too. Most extrawdin'ry. He was booked through, too, sir."

Adrian breathed a long, comfortable sigh.

"So endeth the first lesson—and the last. They wouldn't be warned. Thank you, steward; you may bring me a tall glass of Scotch and soda!"

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V

A BLACK yacht was speeding away, on a course west-southwest of Honolulu, as fast as her swift-running turbines could propel her. Her wake creamed behind and her slim cutwater sliced through the seas as smoothly as a knife goes through oil. Her lines were fine, but there the nattiness ended. It was long since her decks had known the touch of a holystone and the brasswork was covered with paint.

About her there faintly hung the ineffable mixture of odors of island commerce—the rancidity of copra, the salt fishiness of trepang and the decayed mollusk smell that clings to pearl shell that has been "rotted out"; just as there lingered about the yacht's character, in many ports, a distinct unsavoriness. Men gossiped about the *Opae* and Government cruisers watched; yet she slid in and out of ports, her papers faultless, as if engaged in perfectly legitimate traffic.

Five men were seated around the cabin table, while a steward freighted it with bottles and glasses. A sixth man was visible in a stateroom noisily performing ablutions in a basin. The seated ones were those who had been known to Captain Atkinson as Sir Hubert Mackintosh, F. R. G. S., Eugene Tallboys, Charlie Chong, Oscar Blades, Hawaiian planter; and the consumptive missionary with the irritating whistle.

The sixth man, who presently appeared, wiping his face lustily with a towel, might have been the Hawaiian Prince, Solomon Puaolani, save that his brown color had disappeared, showing the features of a white man, continually greasy with perspiration, and of a strong Hebraic cast. By the transition he became Abraham Solomons, millionaire, well and unfavorably known in Hongkong.

Mr. Blades, having exchanged puttees and riding-whip for a nautical uniform and vizored cap, resumed his proper station as sailing-master of Charlie Chong's yacht, the *Opae*. Mr. Capers, pseudo-missionary, sometime mourned by swindled clients, had been known as "Tony" Barnett, a New York broker, whom Broadway had broken. Sir Hubert Mackintosh, in his own familiar waters, was better known as Benjamin Pease, master mariner, pirate and copartner of Bully Hayes; a man of resource and superior endowments.

Mr. Eugene Tallboys was his own shady self—opium dealer and cadger for favors from more potent rascals than himself; a jackal whose teeth were exceeding sharp. Of Chong's history enough has been said to suffice.

Mr. Solomons poured and swallowed a huge drink.

"Oh, it was easy—so easy!" he laughed unctuously. "He fell for it like a lamb; and there we were, all of us shaking for fear we'd have to kill the beggar. 'One look!' says he. 'Only one look!' and then ——Oh, my!" and he rocked with uproarious mirth.

"And that," sneered Tallboys, "is the blighted ass who for all these years has been the sacred, secret agent—the trusted, faithful-to-death little Fido of the Administration! Upon my word, the man's reputation had me scared to a whisper."

"That's all right," said Solomons, "but you can thank me and Ben for making it so easy—me for slipping him the knockout stuff and Ben for playing up the true and loyal friend."

Ben Pease gravely shook his head.

"You fellows may be right, but it doesn't look good to me. It was *too* easy. I know that chap better than any of you, and if he's one of the silly ass type, then I'm one, too. I tell you it smells fishy."

"Huh!" grunted Solomons. "What's ailing you, Ben? We have the swag, haven't we, and a fortune apiece due from old Lee Toy and his crowd? Hand over the box, Charlie! Let's have a look-see!"

Charlie Chong placed the filigree jewel case reverently on the table. The pudgy fingers of Solomons closed over it with a greedy clutch. Once, twice, thrice he pressed the golden spring, the last time impatiently and with force, but the box did not open.

"Confound it! The thing's stuck!" he cried angrily.

"Let me have it!"

It was the cool, dominating voice of Ben Pease. He extended his lean, strong hand, and Solomons, now trembling with vexation and impatience, flung the case toward him. Then he glanced at his thumb for an instant and irritably wiped off three tiny drops of blood.

Pease seemed to be in no haste. He

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turned the case about in his hands and examined it minutely with deep interest, testing it with cautious, sensitive fingers.

"Open it!" snarled Tallboys. "Open the thing up! Here, let me have it!" And he roughly snatched the case.

SUDDENLY Solomons rose to his feet. He was gasping and clawing at his throat.

"What's this? My Heavens, what's this?" he cried hoarsely, as he tore away collar and neckband with a jerk. "Give me a drink! Quick!"

They turned to him, startled. His heavy-lidded eyes were bulging, and the breath whistled in his throat. His coarse neck seemed to be swelling before their eyes. Pease poured whisky into a tumbler and he gulped at it, spilling half down his shirt, his teeth chattering against the glass, which presently fell from his hand and smashed to atoms. His face grew dark with blood. He swayed ponderously, clutching at the edge of the table.

"It's got me! Oh, my Heaven! it's got me! His eye, his cursed eye! Can't you see it? Ugh-r——"

His voice, which had risen to a shriek, died to a choking gurgle. His face was horribly blotched and bloated and streaming sweat. A spray of saliva blew from his thick lips, and he fell crashing to the floor, where, after writhing and choking, with a final shudder he stiffened and lay still.

Capers, pale and shaking, poured a carafe of water over the face, now terrible to see.

"It's no use," said Pease quietly. "He's dead."

"Apoplexy," said Tallboys coolly. "He's had a touch of it before. Poor old Abie couldn't stand the excitement. Well, we can't help him now. Ugh! Throw something over his face. The man's a sight!"

Charlie Chong was sitting tilted back, his thumbs in his waistband. His eyes looked into those of Pease. Each pair held a meaning look that yet was a startled question.

"Poor old Abie!" Tallboys continued, lighting a cigarette. "He was a good chum, and he leaves a pot of money. Well, we're richer by his share in this business!"

With a particularly evil grin he turned his back to the dead man and began fumbling at the catch of the jewel case with his thin, yellow fingers. On a sudden he flung it down as if it had been a snake.

"Ouch!" he yelled. "The thing's pricked me!"

"Oh, rot!" said Blades in disgust. "Here, let's have it! What a fuss you're making! Let's get at the Pearl!"

He and Capers reached out simultaneously, their eyes blazing with eagerness, and together they grasped the case. Pease sprang to his feet.

"Stop it!" he cried. "Tony! Blades! Drop that thing! It's poisoned! Drop it, you cursed fools!"

But he was too late. Both men, in the eagerness of a none-too-friendly struggle, had pressed the spring repeatedly.

"Wh—what's that?" cried Capers in amazement. "Poisoned! What the——"

"Did it prick you, Tony? And you, Blades?"

Pease's voice had fallen tense and low.

"Well, I fear, Tony, you'll never see Broadway again. Blades, the medicine chest is in your room. Try a hypodermic of permanganate—and better cut off your thumbs, though I fear it will do no good."

Charlie Chong was leaning forward on the table staring in fascination at Tallboys, whose face had turned a sickly green as he gazed at his punctured thumb. He turned to Chong, shaking like a leaf.

"Why didn't you tell me, Charlie? You knew it, you half-caste dog! You knew it and you wanted it all!"

"I did not know it," said Chong steadily. "It is Pease's idea. I'm not sure of it—yet!"

"Oh, my Heaven, Charlie!" whimpered Tallboys between gasps, as he slid to the floor. "Oh, my Heaven!"

PEASE and Charlie Chong sat opposite each other, the jewel case between them on the table. Pease looked at it with a shudder. His face had drawn into tense lines.

"I think I see," he said. "But only a part. The man played a game with us. But poison isn't a white man's weapon, and Atkinson——"

"Has spoiled a very pretty tradition," said Chong.

"It isn't a white man's way," continued Pease. "And so Atkinson—at the last—— Confound it, Charlie, the man tried to warn us; don't you remember?"

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"No, I don't see. I don't see why he should warn us when we had stolen the case with the Pearl inside. And now we'll just get at that Pearl!"

He found a small hatchet, and laying the case on its side split it with a single blow. A great pearl, with a bloody smear on it, rolled out on the table cloth. He picked it up and turned it about in his fingers for some moments. Pease saw his face go dark and then yellow-white.

"What is it?" cried Pease. "What's the matter?"

Chong continued to stare at the gem with a painful fascination. He wet his finger at his lips and drew it across the bloody smear several times without result. Then he dipped it into a glass of raw Scotch whisky that stood near, repeated the rubbing, and under his finger the mark of the Bloody Pearl of China dimmed and faded to nothing. He leaped to his feet—Chong, the imperturbable, the emotionless!—and flung the pearl at Pease.

"Matter!"

His voice broke into shrieking falsetto.

"You want to know what's the matter! Well, the matter is that that thing—that's just killed four men—the Chang-Hwa Pearl—is a fish-pearl! A fish-pearl, do you hear! The joke's on us! Ha, ha, ha!"

A while later the steward, fancying he heard a summons, found in the cabin four dead men in tortured attitudes; a living man rocking to and fro in hysterical laughter; and another with a wild light in his eye who chewed savagely on a cold cigar and ground something viciously into the floor with his foot.

VI

CAPTAIN ADRIAN ATKINSON, the stains of travel only partially obliterated, was ushered at once, upon delivery of his card, into Sir Philip Dart's library. Sir Philip beamed on him with outstretched hand.

"Adrian, my dear boy! I'm so glad to see you! Sit down, sit down. Now, tell me what you are doing in this part of the world—that is, if you may discreetly. I'm only a private citizen now, and not entitled to secrets." The old gentleman laughed with pleasure, for he was very fond of his young protégé.

"Haven't you heard, sir?"

"Not a word. I had no idea of your whereabouts. I'm out of the news zone, except what I glean from the daily papers, and, of course they only touch the outside of things. The way they treated the Allied Armies mess was merely amusing."

"There should have been a despatch, explaining—— By Jove! Sir Philip, I've probably beaten it to England. That leaves me at a loss——"

"Wait a moment. It may be here."

Sir Philip turned to the pile of correspondence with which he had been busy before Adrian's arrival. From a large envelope he drew forth a document with a single large seal. The characters were Chinese.

"H'm! H'm!" ejaculated Sir Philip, as he read. "This may have some bearing on it. It appears to be only a semi-official document. It states that a messenger will call on me and place in my hands—h'm—a certain object which is to be considered a token of appreciation of services rendered to a grateful nation; that on account of its nature the token had best not be specifically mentioned, and that an official document of presentation will follow when it is known that the messenger has fulfilled his mission. H'm! H'm! A trifle ambiguous, I must say. I can't conceive——But I presume you hold the solution of this, Adrian?"

"I fancy I do."

Adrian took a small object from his vest pocket, carefully polished it with a silk handkerchief, and laid in the palm of his former chief the Chang-Hwa Pearl. Sir Philip looked at it and started.

"Good Lord!" said he. "Why—why——"

He laid the Pearl down before him and agitatedly wiped his glasses. Again he inspected it, and there grew in his kind old eyes such a look of tenderness and worship as one might bestow on a beloved child.

"The Pearl!" he whispered. "*The* Pearl—the Chang-Hwa Pearl!"

He turned to Adrian.

"And this is for me—from the Empress? Why?"

"For services rendered, I believe," replied Adrian, and repeated the little he had heard from the Chinese Minister.

Sir Philip listened, pacing back and forth, now and then looking lovingly at the Pearl. When Adrian had finished he regarded the other quizzically.

"My boy," said he, "I don't believe you have a sentiment or emotion about you.

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You walk in here and prosaically hand me from your pocket that lovely thing, which I consider the finest of the three most beautiful pearls in the world, as if you were delivering the mail. By the way, there was a case belonging to the Pearl—a most malign thing. I trust they destroyed it. Tell me, did you actually bring that Pearl all the way from China in your waistcoat pocket?"

"Hardly. I should have lost it. There was a case—the original one——"

"Yes, yes! What of it?"

"It was stolen from me. Quite a regrettable affair. It was a remarkable piece of work, that case."

Sir Philip rubbed his hands.

"Ah! So there have been adventures by the way? Tell me about them."

He rang a bell and a servant brought adequate articles on a tray. Adrian, fortified by a draft from a tall glass of Scotch and soda and a few inhalations of a cigarette, began his story.

"HIS EXCELLENCY assured me in the beginning that no one was in the secret but her Majesty, himself and me. He seemed to think, moreover that some dinky mechanism in the false spring of the case would be some protection. I had a suspicion that the thing was poisoned, but that was not my affair. At any rate, I had no faith in it, and I called on Quong Lee. I had an idea of my own, you see; so I asked Quong if he had ever seen the Chang-Hwa Pearl. Fortunately he had. You know Quong, sir—safe as a father confessor."

"H'm! Go on, please," said Sir Philip.

"I asked Quong to procure for me an imitation of the Chang-Hwa Pearl. In the present state of affairs in China there is a good deal of intriguing, inside and out, and I have been keeping in touch with the police and Secret Service for several years. I fancied I knew the men who might try for the Pearl.

"Quong got the fish-pearl, but we had the deuce of a time getting the blood smear on it. 'Most everything we tried refused to take hold, and shrank up in pinpoint drops as if the pearl were greased. Then Quong thought of a stain he was trying on microscope slides; carb—carbol something or other, and it worked like a charm.

"It took more time to get the smear just right, but when it was done I assure you, sir, it was a corking job. Under artificial light and not *too* close a scrutiny it was the Chang-Hwa Pearl to the life, as it were.

"The stain was soluble only in alcohol, so there was no fear of its rubbing off. Then I knew that if I got through alive the big Pearl was safe.

"On shipboard I recognized some of my fellow passengers at once. You see, I've been keeping a systematic 'Who's Who' of the shady chaps who are in crooked deals of the larger sort. One never knows when it will prove useful.

"There was a man named Tallboys, an opium smuggler; Charlie Chong, who owns the notorious yacht *Opae;* a consumptive chap whom I didn't suspect till later; and a man who introduced himself as Sir Hubert Mackintosh, the explorer.

"By Jove! That chap would have passed muster anywhere, and at first he had me. He was as smooth as silk and vastly entertaining. I liked him immensely and tried hard to place him, till one night I saw him peeking into my port, and it flashed over me.

"I had seen him in court once in a barratry case. He wasn't Sir Hubert at all, though he looked a lot like the photo in his book. He was Ben Pease, the shifty little pirate—a mighty capable man.

"There were two more who came aboard at Honolulu. One they introduced as some bally Kanaka Prince or other, but he hadn't blacked up carefully enough. I could see white in the orifices of his ears. When he turned his profile, in spite of all the flowers, I spotted him for Abie Solomons, of Hongkong. The other masquerader was the Captain of Chong's yacht.

"Between the lot they got the case away from me. It was fortunate for me. I was afraid they'd wait till San Francisco, where I might have been killed and dropped overboard. Of course, I played into their hands a bit, and once it was done my troubles were over and I came straight through to England without a hitch. That's about all, sir."

"All!" exclaimed Sir Philip. "Good gracious, man! *How* did they get the case? And *why* was it fortunate and——Oh, go on!"

Adrian hitched uneasily.

"They tried it at Honolulu because we arrived at night, I fancy. You see, they knew I had the Pearl on me somewhere.

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They knew I hadn't given it to the purser, whose tin-pot safe they could have cracked easily, so they ransacked my room, bored holes in my boots and finally located the case under my arm, where I carried it, when Pease looked through the port.

"They watched to get me in my state-room, but I was careful to remain on deck. The Capers chap did the watching and set up a deucedly annoying whistle whenever any of the ship's people were about. They got talking of pearls, then of the Chang-Hwa Pearl, drugged my whisky which I poured on the floor, and got me to give them a glimpse of the pearl in the gold case. Then they blackjacked me and left——"

"A glimpse of the pearl?"

"Yes, the fish-pearl. It was in the case, you know. That's what they stole and got away with, and I was very glad when it was over that I got no worse than a swipe with a blackjack. My head ached for a few days, and that was the end of it. If it had been San Francisco——"

"But the Pearl, man! The real Pearl! What of it?"

Captain Atkinson grew more ill at ease. He puffed nervously at his cigarette, and his face reddened.

"The real Pearl——Well, of course, you have it now, safe and sound. There was no chance of their trying a second time. And if that spring was poisoned, I rather think Mr. Pease & Co. had an interesting time. I tried to warn the beggars; I really did, sir, but they struck me with the blackjack, or rather, Pease did——"

"Adrian, please be explicit. They stole the case and the fish-pearl. They did not steal the real Pearl. Where was it all this time?"

"It is—ah—rather a delicate subject, Sir Philip. May we not avoid it?"

"Young man!"

Sir Philip shook his finger fiercely at Adrian, who was regarding him with every appearance of extreme embarrassment.

"If I should die this minute without knowing where you hid that Pearl, I'd come back and haunt you till you told. Out with it!"

Adrian resolutely poured another drink.

"Very well, sir, if you *must* have it! It—is rather shocking. You know how I lost part of my sight, Sir Philip. I wear, as you know, an artificial eye—a thin shell, like the deep bowl of a small teaspoon. Well, I carried your Pearl in the—hang it!—in the socket, behind. Ugh! It was deucedly disagreeable, I assure you!"

RESOLUTION

By BERTON BRALEY

I HAD vowed I would stick to my own abode
When Lady Adventure came down the road.
I'd sworn that no power could make me stir,
But she laughed in my eyes—and I followed Her!

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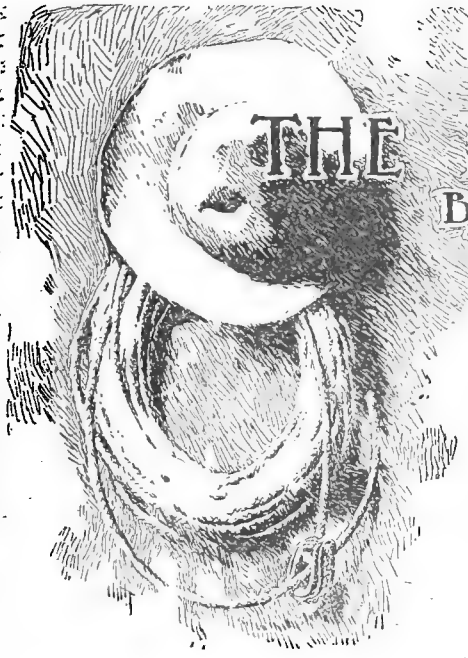

THE RANGE RIDER

By William West

SYNOPSIS—Pretty young **Helen Beran** comes to Pine Village, Ariz., with her visionary tenderfoot father to settle on a near-by ranch in the Black Mesa Forest Reserve, which the latter had bought from one **Nephi Lane.** Being only a squatter on the Reserve, Nephi thought that he had cheated Beran.

But subsequently Congress passes a law allowing squatters to perfect title to their lands, and also giving them grazing privileges in the Reserve. **Barclay Hyatt,** the local Range Rider, informs the Berans how Nephi has overreached himself. The Ranger adds that under the new law the area of Government sheep pasturage which had hitherto been allotted to Nephi's brother and father, **David** and **Moroni Lane,** had been curtailed. He suggests that they lease this vacant range and go into the sheep business with their neighbor, **Bill McGhie.**

A company is accordingly formed, with a carefully worded charter, drawn up by a lawyer friend of the Ranger. Helen is elected Secretary and Treasurer. She, her father and Bill hold $10,500 of the $20,000 capital stock, the rest being taken by a friend of the Range Rider, a **Mr. Baker,** of Baker & Puddifoot, stockmen.

Learning of the deal, Moroni and Dave send to Prescott for one **Forbes,** a shyster lawyer-politician, whose work is to be paid for by the powerful political support of the Lanes. Forbes trumps up the charge that the Berans got their ranch by fraud. Setting out for the Range Rider's camp to ask advice about this, Helen meets Dave Lane, who inveigles her into letting him give her a lift and later attempts to force her into marrying him. She is rescued by the Range Rider. Circumstances compel her to spend the night at his camp. On her return home she is escorted to a village dance by Forbes, who has ingratiated himself with the Beran family.

CHAPTER XIV

THE VILLAGE DANCE

HELEN was at a loss to know what was the matter before she had waited in the dressing-room ten minutes. It would have attracted her attention sooner but for the fact that she had never been on what one would call intimate terms with any of the village girls or women. She had always been courteous and pleasant when meeting them at the store or the post-office, and she had never "put on dog" with them by virtue of a superior social position once held but now lost. So far as she was aware she had no enemies among the Mormon women nor had she ever given occasion to any of them to feel resentful toward her.

Miss Hilda Petersen, who, by virtue of her accomplishments and position, was deemed exempt from some of the rigid forms of Mormon ceremony, stood over near the opposite wall, where the men were to line up, and carelessly talked and laughed

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with several of the latter in a manner that would have made the more rigidly restrained girls of the village green with envy at her liveliness and freedom from restrictions. Hilda at times cast a sidelong glance at Helen's lonely little figure and made remarks that caused her audience to guffaw loudly, but Helen was serenely unconscious of all this. Her eyes were on the door and she did not give Miss Petersen a thought.

Then Forbes entered, and the girl arose and went to meet him, smiling at him in a way that caused the blood to sing in his veins. He did not know that the smile was induced by the warm feeling at sight of a face that she could count upon for friendliness. Helen was beginning to feel the chill of the atmosphere and welcomed Forbes as a rock of refuge.

But Forbes was more observing than she and a glance at the row of male faces that followed him across the floor with speculating, aloof glances, convinced him that there was something wrong. He kept his ears pricked for a word that might throw light on the mystery, and, in the meantime, kept up an appearance of ignorance, sitting with Helen on the women's side and conversing animatedly with her.

"By the way," he remarked after a little while, "I met your friend, the Ranger, out in the barn and he was much interested in my horse. I don't know the fellow, I think, though it was so dark that I could not see what he looked like, yet his voice was rather familiar. Some fellow I've met in Prescott, I reckon.

"He and I had quite a discussion as to the merits of my *caballo*, and his local pride was rather amusing. It resulted in my agreeing to submit the horse to a rather unusual test on Sunday. He and I are to coöperate in running down and catching a wonderful mustang, that is, if my horse is all I claim it to be. But I'm sure the Ranger won't be able to laugh at him after the test."

"I'm not so sure," smiled Helen. "He seems to me to be the kind of man that laughs at everything, including himself, though he pretends to be very grave. It is a mystery to me how such a man came to take up the rough work he is doing. That David Lane says that he is a remittance man."

"A remittance man?" repeated Forbes. "He talks like an illiterate cow puncher. Nothing mysterious about him that I could see."

"Illiterate!" cried Helen. "Why, he is very far from that. At least, he always talks like a man of education. It could not have been he that you met."

"His name was Hyatt," insisted Forbes, frowning.

He was a constitutionally suspicious person, and the memory of the Ranger's voice remained with him. He decided to say no more about the man until he was surer of his ground. So he asked Helen if she had ever heard of the horse that was called the Pivot Rock Sorrel. But Helen never had, though she was able to tell him that Pivot Rock was some sort of queer formation up on the Forest near a spring.

BUT whatever interest the subject held for them was soon placed in the background by the entrance of the Ranger himself. Helen felt her eyes leap to the man as if drawn by a magnet, and the feeling that they did so against her will made her a little angry. She did not notice that Forbes started when the Ranger stepped through the door into the full light of the room and carelessly tossed his hat upon a chair near the door. She did not hear the low whistle with which he drew in his breath.

Neither did she realize that the row of women on her own side of the room, as well as that of men opposite them, was watching with intent eyes that flew from her to the Ranger and back again, and that every one seemed cruelly interested in the actions of the two of them. And behind the Ranger walked Dave Lane, his face sullen and malicious, his look, like all others', bent on the man in front of him, who seemed oblivious of his near presence.

The man had something of a power of fascination for Helen. There was a barely perceptible, vague suggestion of a cat or other animal in his movements. It caused her to watch him as if he were some curious brute in a cage. Her regard seemed so utterly impersonal to herself that she never thought of any other construction that might be placed on it.

The man was different, and he puzzled her, which was all she thought of. He had been of service to her and she was very grateful to him; but the idea that she might

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ıtertain any other feeling had never ocırred to her.

Forbes spoke in her ear, and she barely eard him as she watched the Ranger.

"Hyatt, hey?" he whispered. "Wasn't ıat the name you gave him?"

She nodded, and Forbes puckered his lips ı a soundless whistle and said no more. eople were tittering behind their hands nd he was well aware that there was some ıystery here that he had not fathomed. eeing that the Ranger was turning toward hem and that Helen was watching him ome, Forbes slid quietly away to a near-by roup and sought information.

IN THE meantime the Ranger, apparently oblivious of the interest his advent caused, unless that ocasional swift, sidelong glance was evidence hat he noted it, walked over to Helen and ook the hand that she held out to him.

"Having a good time?" he asked; and, vithout waiting for her answer, "It's a larned cold day for September, isn't it?"

"Why," said Helen, "I thought it quite warm."

"Well, that's as you look at it," said the Ranger. "I'll admit that you might call it warm, too."

The dryness of his tone conveyed his meaning more certainly than the words, and Helen instinctively looked around at the women who lined the wall. Every eye had been on her, but as she turned most of them swung away as if moved by strings.

It came then to Helen that there was a terrible antagonism in the very air, and she felt her heart sink and then beat rapidly as if she had been actually scared by a threat. She looked for Forbes, and saw him standing among a group of men. On his face was a frown of perplexity and he did not meet her eye. She did not know whether he was better informed of the cause of this feeling than she was, but she suspected that he was. Those men must have told him.

"Mr. Forbes," she asked him abruptly, when her escort rejoined her, "what is the reason for the peculiar attitude of all these people toward me?"

Forbes appeared to be immensely surprised.

"Why, I hadn't noticed anything of the kind," he rejoined wonderingly. "They are interested in you, of course. You are very pretty, you know."

"I don't think that is it," said Helen coldly.

Forbes said nothing, but watched the Ranger, who had strolled slowly down the long line of men. The latter's head was thrust a little forward and his gait was more and more suggestive of a cat's gliding approach. There was something threatening and dangerous about his attitude. The men seemed to feel this, and the murmur of conversation died to silence whenever he passed a group.

The Ranger slid across the floor and approached the knot of men surrounding Miss Petersen. These had been most forward in the laughter and gestures directed at Helen. The men stopped talking and edged away as the Ranger approached, but Miss Petersen faced him with her florid face insolently defiant. The Ranger stopped in front of the group and stood facing the woman.

Helen could not hear what transpired between them, but she could see that the Ranger, after some casual exchange, apparently asked a question. Miss Petersen answered it with a light and mocking laugh, and the Ranger's head reared as if he had dodged a blow. At this moment the music, played by a Scotch fiddler, struck up for the march.

FORBES'S hand was on Helen's arm and she rose to take her place in the line, but she kept her eyes on the Ranger. Miss Petersen, after her remark, had walked away with her partner. The Ranger wheeled and swept across the floor toward the spot where Dave Lane was standing with several of the men. The knot had already begun to break up and the individuals were moving away to get their partners. But they hesitated and then gathered together again as if in mutual fear of that swift approach. There was an electric tension in the air.

Some woman behind Helen whispered to another, and the girl heard it as plainly as if it had been shouted in her ear:

"The shameless Gentile, to show herself here after spending the night at his camp!"

Helen felt the blood run cold in her veins and then surge hotly to her face. She felt dizzy and sick and staggered back a pace, turning toward Forbes like a stricken fawn.

"Take—take me away!" she choked. "I want to go!"

Forbes hardly knew what to do. He had

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not yet made up his mind what this story signified. If it was true—and it must be—he might have been sadly mistaken in his estimate of the girl's character. If that was so her conquest would be a lot more simple, yet he was afraid to assume as much. He had no time to plan his course, however, for, as he hesitated, Helen gathered her skirt in her hand and ran across the room toward the Ranger, who was now facing that group in the center of which shrank Dave Lane, attempting to hide his uneasiness beneath a show of bravado.

Helen was about to seize the Ranger's arm and cling to it as a friendly anchor, but she was a thought too late. As she fluttered up to him he had taken a step forward and with the calm certainty of a machine had driven his fist fair between Dave Lane's eyes. The bulky figure was driven backward as if a pile driver had struck him and he went crashing over backward among the chairs. Helen stood there swaying, almost ready to fall herself, until the Ranger stepped back and took her by the arm.

"I don't like this place worth a cent, anyhow," he drawled. "Let's pull our freight out of it."

Helen clung to his arm, half hiding her face against it, and tottered on that support toward the door. She was vaguely conscious that there was a tumult behind them and that the music had stopped, but her one thought was to get out of that hostile atmosphere as soon as possible. She did not hear Forbes's call. She did not know what had impelled her to fly to the Ranger for help. She only felt that she was safer in his protection than in any other's and that he would do the best thing for her. They reached the door, and as he stopped to get his hat from the chair the wail of Dave Lane reached them:

"He had a gun, I tell you. What chance did I have?"

The Ranger laughed a little and led her out into the fresh night air.

CHAPTER XV

FORBES OUTLINES A PLAN

THERE was quite a little excitement in the schoolhouse following the dramatic departure of Helen and the Ranger. Men garbed in shiny, tight, black coats, from which red and hairy wrists protruded, and women in stiffly starched calico or muslins rushed to the center of interest, which was in the vicinity of the bruised and vociferous Dave Lane. The Ranger's blow had reopened the wound on Dave's forehead and the blood that trickled down his distorted face made him a horrible object to look at.

But at least one of the spectators was unaffected by his unprepossessing appearance. This was the yellow-haired Miss Petersen, who had flown to his assistance as soon as the event had occurred. It is true that her moaning cries and loud denunciations of the Ranger met with a poor reward from the object of her sympathy, as did her outbursts against Helen.

When the woman sought to assist Dave and show her solicitude for him he pushed her away with a curse. Another woman took her place and Hilda in her anxiety broke into hot claims to the right of priority in womanly ministrations to her abused lord and master.

"Here, you get away from him! I reckon I got the right to 'tend to him an' not any of you folks. Oh, Dave! Look at me, honey! Say you ain't hurt!"

"Say, you git outa here," snarled Dave. "I'd ha' fixed that fellow," he continued shrilly, "but you all saw he had his gun with him, didn't you? I couldn't do nothin' against a fellow with a gun, could I?"

"Of course you couldn't, Dave dearie, soothed Hilda, grasping his arm. "The brute! I wish I'd 'a' been in reach of him. I'd 'a' given him something to think about; him and that Injun-haired hussy of his! But never you mind, Davie. I'll get even with both of them, if it takes me a thousand years."

"Aw! Shut up, can't you?" snarled Dave.

A girl from the Verde who had come to the dance with one of the cowmen from that settlement and who lacked the stolidness of the Mormon women, touched Hilda on the arm.

"I'd leave him alone if I was you," she said. "He's in a vicious temper—and I don't blame him, after that wallop."

"Leave him alone yourself," cried Hilda indignantly. "I reckon I got a better right to him than any one else. Ain't I his wife, you hussy? Wasn't I married to him by the Bishop over in Showlow no longer ago than last Spring? You all clear out of here and leave me be with him."

The Gentile girl stepped back, startled by

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this disclosure. But Dave, noting the furtive looks of the others, broke into fresh curses directed at the faithful Hilda.

"Shut up, blame you!" he yelled. "Want to tell everybody in the country about it an' git me arrested fer bustin' the law? Git out o' here an' leave me alone."

Forbes had come up to the group after a hesitating move to follow the Ranger and Helen. He was listening now to the soul expansion of Dave under the influence of excitement and rage. Forbes was one who gathered his information thoroughly before marking out his course of action and he was intent upon missing none of this flow of reason.

"Thought you was going to marry that Beran girl, Dave," he projected into the profanity. "Didn't know you were already married."

Dave turned his bloodshot eyes on him.

"Marry her?" he sputtered. "I'd 'a' married her maybe, an' I reckon it don't make no difference if I have got a wife. But I wouldn't marry her now, you can bet, if she was to beg me to. It was her that brought that blamed Ranger on to me up on the Mountain when I wasn't doin' nothin' to her but tryin' to kiss her.

"An' I guess I wasn't to blame none when she asks me to take her up there. How was I to know she was that kind? An' I was offerin' to marry her all the time. An' that Ranger done hit me over the haid with a six gun an' took her off. But I'll fix 'em both, you can bet your last cent!"

Dave was evidently half drunk beside being fuddled by rage and the fist of the Ranger. He was wildly garrulous and alternated his threats against his enemies with defense of his conduct toward Helen which, as yet, was entirely unknown to his listeners.

Even Hilda, who had been the first, inspired by jealousy, to circulate the tale of Helen's intrigue with the Ranger as it had been told to her by Dave, was, up to this time, quite ignorant of the facts. But she was rapidly being enlightened, as were Forbes and the other listeners. The Gentile girl from the Verde and her escort drew away from the crowd, the girl uttering her disgust.

"Let's get out of this filthy hole," she muttered. "We were fools to come over here."

The cowman looked back darkly at the gesticulating man.

"If that story has any truth in it," he growled, "I'm sure ready to gamble that there will be a cleaning out of this hole. What that *hombre* needs and what he's plumb liable to get is a nice, new lass' rope slung over the nearest tree."

"Don't start anything that isn't necessary," answered the girl. "I got a good look at the fellow that hit him and I reckon he can take care of Mr. Lane all right. He was a stinging lizard if I ever saw one."

In the meantime, Forbes, leaving Hilda to ponder over the revelations of Dave's double-dealing, had grasped that person by an arm and led him out into the air. He shook Dave into some realization of the surroundings and, getting his horse and buggy out of the barn, placed the fuddled man in it and drove rapidly away toward the Lane ranch. The swift movement had the effect of sobering Dave to a slight extent and when Forbes had dragged him into the house and set him in a chair before his disconcerted father, Dave was almost normal.

"What's all this?" old Moroni wanted to know. Forbes explained briefly and then turned to Dave.

"Now tell us just what happened up on that Mountain," he said sternly. "And see that you don't keep any of it back. If you have spoiled our plans, you knot-headed fool, it will be worse for you. Spill the story, now!"

Dave, under his father's glaring eyes and the threatening attitude of Forbes, hung his head and told the true tale of his brutal tricking of the girl and the events that had ended in his getting a broken head. The two listeners took the news with different feelings. Moroni was quite callous about the ethics of Dave's conduct and was not at all concerned with what might have happened to Helen. He was furiously angry with Dave because the latter's conduct threatened to mar their plans and render them abortive.

As for Forbes, unscrupulous as he was, the assault on the girl filled him with indignation and he was glad that the Ranger had avenged it. Yet his indignation did not entirely overlie his judgment. Primarily he was thinking of the effect of all this on his own future, even as Moroni was. When Dave had finished his tale, Forbes took the floor and his tones were authoritative.

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"Now you've gone and made a mess of this affair and I'm going to take charge of it henceforth. Listen to me, both of you, and see that you take it in. In the first place you have both of you got to leave this Ranger alone. He's a little too big game for you sheepmen to fly at and you had better tumble to that right away. You, Dave, he'd break in his hands like a cracker if you mixed with him and if you think he can't buck the Mormon Church, Moroni, I'll tell you that he can buck the Standard Oil Company if he takes a notion to.

"Never mind who he is. 'Twouldn't do you any good to know and you might lose some sleep over it. But it's my cue to be mighty friendly with that fellow and I'm going to be just as friendly as he'll let me.

"Another thing. He's taken an interest in that Beran girl and for that reason you all see that this lying talk about her stops right where it is. Understand me?

"Now this sheep business can go ahead on the lines I'll lay down for you and if you keep this Ranger out of the mess I don't see why we can't pull it off to everybody's advantage. If he horns into it there will be the deuce to pay and we'll all get into trouble. I tell you if he gets after us I'll drop you and your schemes like hot cakes."

"Eh!" gaped Moroni. "Who is the feller?"

"That's his business. What he's doing as a Ranger is more than I know, but if he wants to pose as a sheep herder I'm not going to cross him. What you'll do is just what I tell you to.

"First you've got to get solid with old Beran, Moroni, and for that reason it will be necessary for you to disown Dave's conduct and be just as mad about the whole thing as any one else.

"I'll see him in the brimstone lake before I'll go whinin' to that Beran feller an' apologizin' fer what Dave done to the hussy," snarled Moroni. "Served her right, I say, an' I'm glad he done it "

"That'll do!" said Forbes. "You'll do what I say or you won't have a sheep on that Reserve next year. You have eight thousand sheep without a range as it is and there's only one way to break even on this game and that's to sell them to Beran. Don't you see, you fool, that you can get rid of a lot of old, broken-mouthed ewes at a big price by working that old natural? And if you'll leave it to me and do what I tell you we can break up this fool live-stock company before it ever gets started. I've got him in a state of mind now where all I've got to do is suggest a thing to him and he'll do it. The girl don't know anything about business and that Bill McGhie is negligible. See here! I'll tell you what you are to do."

AS HE went on and outlined his scheme the two men gradually lost their sullen attitude and became enthusiastic over their prospects of loot and revenge. Dave saw the way to get even with the girl and to reduce her father to ruin and though he regretted that the plan did not provide for attacking the Ranger also, he saw, where Forbes did not, that a blow at Helen would hit that enemy as surely as if directed at him. Moroni was viciously pleased at the prospects of gain and mean revenge and cared not a whit whom the plan injured.

"But we've got to keep the Ranger out of this, remember," warned Forbes. "He will have no call to interfere in Beran's business affairs and as long as we leave him alone and the girl isn't bothered, he will keep quiet. Meantime, you line up your votes, Moroni, and see that this county goes for me. If I once get to Congress as Territorial Delegate, I'll be in a position to defy this Ranger, but if he runs afoul of me now, I'm done."

"Well, I ain't so sure you're entitled to my support," demurred Moroni. "You ain't be'n none too respectful toward the Latter Day Saints this evenin'."

"If I don't get 'em," threatened Forbes, "I'll go to this fellow and tell him the whole story and trade it for his support, and I reckon that will go further than yours would. And if you mix with this fellow, Moroni, I can promise you that you'll hear from Salt Lake City and the Council of Twelve before you're much older. They don't like indiscriminate violations of the Edmunds Act.

"Now, there's another thing I want to know. What's this I hear about some wonderful horse called the Pivot Rock Sorrel? I want to know all about that animal."

"He's a mustang that's be'n runnin' near Pivot Rock for about four or five years. He's a six-year-old as near as any one can guess an' the best men in the country have tried to run him down an' he's made 'em

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all look like a local freight. There ain't a hoss in this Territory can touch him.

"He runs off so many of the range mares that a lot of the Verde men have threatened to shoot him, but I hear that blamed Ranger has declared that he's goin' to get that hoss an' that the game law applies to him until he does. I reckon the hoss'll die of old age before he ketches him."

"I don't agree with you," said Forbes. "I see my way to get solid with him now, and I'll gamble that I've got the horse that can run down any grass-fed brute that ever lived, if it was Salvator himself. Now I'm going back to Beran's and get solid with the girl and I want you all to be careful what you do in the meantime."

When Forbes had driven away Dave turned to his father.

"Just the same," he said, "I'm goin' to smoke that feller up if he was a gawd er the President. He ain't goin' to get away with it thataway, none whatever."

"I reckon he ain't so all-fired powerful as Forbes is a makin' him out to be," rejoined Moroni. "I reckon Forbes has gone and got stuck on that gal o' Beran's an' he's fixin' to throw us down. That's a good scheme he fixed up though, an' I reckon we'll try it a while. But you go slow with that Ranger feller an' if you take a shot at him, be sure there ain't no one in sight."

"I'll take care o' that," said Dave.

CHAPTER XVI

THE RANGER GOES OVER MATTERS WITH THE BISHOP AND FORBES

AFTER taking Helen home, the Ranger went directly to the Bishop's house, which was not far from the school. This took him some time and the dancers had resumed the interrupted current of their enjoyment before he came in sight of the building. Bishop Jensen answered the Ranger's knock in person and greeted him cordially, for the earnest young man had been aided on more than one occasion by the officer's superior knowledge. But he looked a little puzzled when he observed the grim lines about the rider's mouth.

"What's the trouble, Hyatt?" he asked. "Anything wrong on the Mountain?"

"No," said the Ranger. "The Mountain still looks serenely on Marathon, but Marathon looks upon the practises of Babylon. There is something going on in Pine that you have got to put a stop to, or I will. And in that case there are likely to be those here who will sit down by the waters of Babylon and weep."

He went on to tell the perturbed Bishop the details of what had happened on the Mountain and the gossip that had been started on its rounds by Hilda and Dave Lane.

The Bishop paced back and forth disconsolately.

"It's goin' to be a job," he said. "What a pity! I'll do what I can, of course, but women is women, Gentile or Saint. An' she's sort o' proud an' wouldn't likely answer none if my wife takes her up. We can make Dave leave the village, but that wouldn't do much good."

"Settle it how you please," said the Ranger impatiently. "But see that there isn't any more of it."

"Would runnin' Dave out do any good, d'ye suppose?"

"He'd probably make a worse tale out of it and spread it all over the Territory," said the Ranger. "It isn't Dave. Cut off that cat, Petersen."

The Bishop turned the matter over, biased a little perhaps, by his theological leanings.

"She ought to be married," he asserted. "If you, now——"

The Ranger started and turned upon him.

"Don't talk foolish, Jensen. The girl would rather drown herself than marry me. Do you suppose she'd enjoy being pitied and jeered at as my wife beside knowing that she was forced into it? Heaven knows——" He paused abruptly and turned away.

Jensen looked at him curiously. He knew no reason for the Ranger's bitterness and thought his protest exaggerated. The girl ought to marry, as was the duty of every woman, and she would be lucky to wed this upstanding man. But it was not his affair, and Jensen had the tact of the dweller in the wilderness.

"Well, it's only one way out of it. There's a plenty of lads around the village would be glad to marry her, an' some more over to the Verde if she don't like Mormons. A girl like that needn't go without a man."

The Ranger grunted his opinion of the Bishop's ideas. The very idea of the girl's marrying any of the men she could pick in the neighborhood was extremely repugnant

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to him. But to the Bishop a man was a man and marriage was marriage. Such a thing as romance had never reached his understanding.

"I wouldn't count on marrying her to any one if I were you," he said as he turned to the door. "But put a stop to all this talk if you can. I know that you are just as concerned about it as I am."

Privately, Bishop Jensen was convinced that his own concern was mild as compared to that of the Ranger; but he refrained from saying so. He pledged himself to labor toward the desired end and the Ranger departed to mount his horse and ride out of the village once more.

As he trotted along toward the turn up the Mountain he heard the sound of a driven horse and turned to meet the swift approach of Forbes. There was moon enough to see by and the recognition was mutual. The Ranger stared glumly as the lawyer drew up, but the latter greeted him with cordiality.

"HELLO, Hyatt!" he said. "That was pretty good, your fooling me back there in the barn. Never dreamed who you were until I saw you in the light. Say! You certainly made a mess of Dave Lane."

"Hmph!" grunted the Ranger, "and I'll make a worse mess of any one else that starts any more rough talk around here."

Forbes ignored the slight emphasis that he might have taken as directed at himself.

"What the deuce are you masquerading here as a Ranger for?" he asked. "Girl in the case?"

"Some people," said the Ranger to the stars, "don't know enough to let dynamite alone. There are others that just dote on monkeying with a buzz saw. It's a wonder to me there aren't a heap more of them injured."

Forbes laughed good-naturedly.

"Well, I know it's none of my business," he said. "I know enough not to butt in on your private affairs. I suppose that horse round-up is a joke, then?"

"It wasn't a joke," said the Ranger, "but I'll take a short leave and stay in the village to see if any one down here has any more to say on a certain subject. We'll let the *rodeo* go for the present."

"No need of that," said Forbes. "I can guess what you mean, and I'll tell you right now there won't be any more loose talk from the Lanes or that Petersen girl. I put a bee in old Moroni's bonnet and I'll guarantee that the others will listen to him and keep a pretty profound silence."

"It's a lot of pull you are getting with Moroni, nowadays," said the Ranger. "I'd think it would be the reverse. But if you stop the cackle, I'll not kick at your methods."

"You know I'm running for Delegate?" asked Forbes.

The Ranger nodded.

"How do you stand on the subject?" the lawyer went on. "I've got most of the railroad and stockmen backing me, Hyatt, and if your people will line up behind me it will be a cinch. And you know that your interests won't suffer at my hands."

"I'm not in politics," said the Ranger shortly. "It isn't healthy for my kind to meddle with any more. I don't give a hoot whether you get the job or not, as long as you keep off my preserves. But if you are so thick with the Lanes, I think you and I will be on opposite sides of the fence. Take my warning, Dickie, and leave the Berans strictly alone, if you don't want to endanger your prospects."

"The Lanes are my clients," protested Forbes, "and they are entitled to any legitimate advice I can give them. I'm not responsible if they have trouble with these Berans."

"I've no objection to legitimate advice," replied the Ranger. "But see that it stays close to the ethical line. Your legal work hasn't always been elevated, Forbes."

"I never killed any children, anyhow," spat Forbes, in sudden fury. "I'm rider enough to stick to a horse in a crowd, too."

The Ranger went white under his tan, but he answered not a word for some moments.

"You can prove that on Sunday," he said. "And, if I were you, I wouldn't make any more remarks like that. It wouldn't be very safe, I think. I've told you how I stand and you can take it or leave it. But don't join in that talk about Miss Beran, if you have any wisdom."

"I've told you that I've called off those fellows," said Forbes, a little frightened at his own outbreak. "There won't be any more trouble from them. And I'll get Miss Beran and her father to come up on Sunday and watch the chase. That ought to show

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everybody that we don't take any stock in the gossip."

"I have no objection," said the Ranger. "And you had better bring an extra horse or two, the best you can get in the village. I'll stop and get Bill McGhie to come up and help."

"We won't need any help. This horse of mine can outrun any range horse in the world."

"Just the same," said the Ranger dryly, "I think I will get Bill. This is a little different animal from most range horses. Where are you bound?"

"I was going to see how Miss Beran was getting along," said Forbes. "I ought to apologize to her for leaving her at the dance. I had to take Dave home."

"I wouldn't disturb her for that purpose if I were you," suggested the Ranger. "She probably will be more inclined to hear it tomorrow. When I left her she wasn't feeling very well."

Forbes drew up and took the hint. The Ranger went on for a mile or two before he turned off the road and began the climb to the top of the Mountain in the dark.

CHAPTER XVII

THE RACE WITH THE PIVOT ROCK SORREL

HELEN looked out of the little silk tent that Forbes had so thoughtfully provided for her, and saw that the sun was just beginning to peep over the hills. It was not more than seven o'clock, yet the Ranger and Forbes were saddling the horses and getting ready to start. The Ranger had been very taciturn when he had joined them the night before and had expressed no joy at seeing her and Helen was a little resentful. Forbes smiled cheerfully at her, however, and she disregarded the Ranger's silence.

On the way to Pivot Rock the Ranger outlined the parts they were to play. Forbes was to remain hidden along the cliffs of West Clear Creek, while Helen was to take her station at a spring near Pivot Rock, upon the high point over which anything seeking to get out of the valley would have to cross. Bill McGhie, Helen learned for the first time, was already stationed at Mud Tanks, to head the beast off from the descent to the Verde. He had camped there last night.

Beran was to take a position at the head of the valley where it opened upon the county road. This arrangement would, if successfully carried out, result in confining the animal to a space no more than ten miles long and less than a mile wide.

The Ranger led them in a circle, dropping Forbes at Clear Creek, whose perpendicular cliffs were unscalable for any living thing without wings, and Beran at the County Road. Then he and Helen rode on to the spring. He was still taciturn and the girl soon gave up the attempt to talk to him. The mousehound followed them, but when the Ranger had posted her on the steep point above the spring he sharply ordered the dog to remain with her.

"He'll help you turn him back if he breaks this way," he muttered in explanation.

Helen sat on a rock, whence she had a fine view of the valley and of the rim of Clear Creek, while the Ranger turned away and slid down to the spring. Helen watched him as he bent over the pool. She saw him take a bottle from his saddlebags and empty it in the spring. He had told her not to attempt to frighten the horse from the water if he came to drink, but to content herself with driving him back if he broke up the point and tried to escape to the wide plateau.

She watched the Ranger as he mounted his horse again and rode at his slow trot into the scrubby pine that cut off her view of the nearer part of the valley. She could see no sign of the horse they were after, but the Ranger rode as if quite sure where to find him. After a while she saw him come out of the denser timber and skirt the slopes on the left of the valley, sifting aimlessly through the scrub cedars and oaks that dotted the hills.

In a few moments more she caught sight of a number of small figures that drifted from the scrub and ran aimlessly around on the bare hillside as if uneasy. They were very small with distance, but she made them out to be horses.

One among them stood motionless and seemed to be watching the path over which the Ranger was trotting. Pretty soon he began to walk rapidly away, stopping occasionally to look back. The other horses bunched around him or ran in circles. Gradually they all passed out of sight around a rise and after a little while the Ranger, now riding more rapidly, followed them.

For fifteen minutes the girl saw nothing more of the chase and then she saw a

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number of wildly running black figures surge over the crest of a rise about three miles away and dash down into the valley. Behind them, running easily, came the figure of the horse that had watched the trail—evidently the stallion they were hunting.

A few minutes passed, and then across the crest leaped the Ranger, but not in the place where the others had crossed. He had swung down the valley and taken the hill at a lower point, not only saving a climb but cutting off considerable distance. He was riding hard, and the girl watched him with interest as he surged nearer, swaying to the sharp turns of his horse and bending gracefully out of the way of the whipping scrub.

The horses turned into the head of the valley and went tearing toward where her father lay in wait for them. The Ranger rode into the cut also, but he had slowed down a little as if in no hurry to gain upon them. Again they all went out of sight.

After a while there was a faint shout and Helen became instantly alert. A little later two or three horses plunged over the point of the gulch below and came rattling toward her.

One, a great, foam-flecked beast with glaring eyes, plunged directly up the hill, scattering rocks and sand beneath his hoofs. He loomed terrific and fierce before her startled eyes and his roaring snorts shook her nerves.

She sprang from her seat and leaped out to view, waving her hat and shouting frantically. The dog leaped out too and yelped wildly, dashing toward the stallion. The horse snorted thunderously, almost like an explosion, wheeled with a crash of rocks, kicking viciously at the empty air, and went rearing and kicking down the slope again.

The Ranger loped across the lower end of the point and waved a hand at her as the horses went crashing away ahead of him, out into the valley again. He was off after them, and his pace quickened to a fast run that kept him close on the heels of the mares that followed the stallion. But the quarry settled down to his paces and left both mares and pursuer far behind. Helen had never seen a horse run like that before.

The stream of flight went on down the valley and once more disappeared over the hills and down to where Bill McGhie must be lying to head them off. The girl settled down again to wait.

Again the skyline above that slope was cut by a sharp figure for an instant and this time the stallion came over the crest like the wind. No mares followed him. A little later another horse scurried over the rise and swept after him. On it was the Ranger, bent forward now and shouting as he urged on his mount, which was flecked with foam like the quarry and running like a greyhound.

THIS time the stallion did not head up the valley toward Beran, but cut directly toward the point on which was Helen. The Ranger slowed down suddenly and trotted away toward the bottom of the gulley in which the spring lay, paying no more heed to the stallion. The great horse ran hard for about a mile and then seemed to sense the fact that he was no longer pursued and slowed down likewise. Still he was going at a good pace when he came across the point and turned up toward the spring.

Helen remembered the injunction that she was to let him drink, and remained out of sight. The horse came to the spring; and, after looking around and circling the spot suspiciously, hurriedly plunged his muzzle into the water and drank with great whistling intakes of his breath. Suddenly he drew his nose from the water and sniffed it suspiciously. Then he tried it again and was apparently no better satisfied.

Finally he kicked up his heels and loped away from the place after a very short drink. Helen saw him swerve sharply from the place where the Ranger lay in wait for him and go sailing off down the valley again.

An hour passed and the chase went on up and down the rugged gulch and as yet the great horse had easily kept in the lead. At times the Ranger would hold him level with a mighty effort of his own good horse and at others the sorrel would draw far in advance.

It was easy to see that the Ranger's horse was tiring. It could not be long before the fresh horse of Forbes would be called upon. But Helen noticed now that as he passed once more below her the great mustang was moaning strangely and that his tongue was hanging out. Something was wrong with him.

The Ranger deftly headed the quarry toward the banks of Clear Creek and Helen realized that Forbes was about to take up the chase. A moment later she saw him

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answer the Ranger's signal by breaking from the shelter of the rocks and come hurtling after the harried beast in front of them.

Forbes's lean black ran like the flying Salvator and gained upon the chase hand over hand for a few minutes. Then the great sorrel seemed to realize that he had a more formidable foe to contend with and he laid his belly to the ground and did the best he knew how. And that was good.

The black was running with all the speed and courage of a long and glorious line, but the wild horse held his own. Yea! And more than held it. Slowly but surely his speed increased. The spurs were going home in the glistening sides of the thoroughbred and he was fairly splitting the wind. But like a smooth machine the yellowish beast in front of him was slowly drawing away. They went storming over the crest of that line of hills and disappeared. A little later the Ranger came trotting up on a gallant horse that staggered with weariness, and, dismounting, began to climb the hill on foot. He had taken the rope from the saddle and left his horse at the bottom, where it stood and panted dejectedly.

The Ranger reached the top and sat down to wipe the sweat from his forehead. He seemed to have regained his cheerfulness, though he was very tired.

"Some chase, that," he remarked with a grin. "There is no atavism in that beast. I wonder if Forbes thinks he's such a scrub now."

"It was glorious!" cried Helen. "But I hope he gets away, poor thing."

"Not a chance," said the Ranger grimly. "I want that horse and I'll have him before long. Where's your beast?"

He went quickly to where Helen's horse, with his own heavy roping-saddle on it, was tethered and led it out. The beast was one of the fastest that the village could boast of. Forbes had received instructions to that effect from the Ranger and had thought best to obey them, though he had scoffed at the idea of needing any horse but his own to catch the mustang. Now the Ranger had slung his rope over the horn of the saddle and was carefully adjusting the cinches.

"They'll be back before long and then I'm going to get that horse. Sorry to disappoint Forbes, but he won't have the glory. It will take a better roper than he is to get that fellow."

"But is that fair to Mr. Forbes?" objected Helen.

"Perhaps not," said the Ranger. "But I need that horse and can't afford to let an ethical quibble stand in the way of my getting it. Besides, it's a lot I care whether Forbes gets his or not."

"You evidently don't like him," said Helen.

"I do not," he replied. "And I am quite sure that he knows it. But I won't quarrel with him so long as he keeps a distance from my affairs."

"He seems quite a pleasant person to me," said Helen. "I should think you would rather be friends with him."

"I would sooner be friends with a snake," said the Ranger, in his matter-of-fact voice. "If it wasn't for that fellow I'd not be where I am now."

"Thank you!" replied Helen demurely. The Ranger looked as if he were about to qualify his remark but thought better of it. He went on with his preparations, whistling softly as he pinched the cinch a cruel notch or two on the groaning and biting horse. By that time the pursuit had swung across the rise out in the valley and was storming toward them once more. The Ranger leaped to his seat and spurred the horse down the hill toward the jutting point that guarded the spring.

Helen had her eyes fixed upon the chase. She noticed with pity that the wild stallion was now running as fast as ever to all appearance, but with wagging head and wavering legs. Now and then he stumbled, and it took no great knowledge of horses to see that he was on the verge of exhaustion.

The Ranger's fresh horse swung out of the brush and converged upon the hunt. His rope was in his hand and the loop was swaying along the side of the horse. He called to Forbes as he ranged along beside him, and the latter nodded and ceased to rowel his horse for long enough to unstrap his own lariat and begin to coil it. The staggering beast ahead of them ran gamely on, but it was evident that he was done for and that the Ranger's fresh horse could overhaul him at will.

Forbes's tailing rope was hauled in and ready when the Ranger shouted and bent over his horse. Forbes jammed the steel home and likewise urged his mount to its utmost speed. They ranged apart and

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crept rapidly up on opposite sides of the stallion. The ropes were whirling together, Forbes's rotating rapidly and that of the Ranger in slow, sinuous sweeps. The former threw first and caught the stallion by the head with a true cast, swinging out and "setting up" his horse for the strain, in good style. The Ranger at that instant drove his horse ahead with a fierce burst of speed.

When the rope settled over the stallion's ears the great beast leaped as if shot, and with a horrible snort gathered all his remaining strength into one final, mighty series of pitching jumps. He knew well what a rope was and also knew that no rope had ever stood the impact of his full strength and weight hurled against it.

He was ready to pit his might against this one, sick as he was, but he did not calculate upon that other rope. He had not fairly gathered his loins under him when the Ranger sent his loop curling snakily under the rearing forefeet. The rope swung upward like a live thing and the coils slid taut around the trapped hoofs. There was a swift wheeling of the Ranger's horse, a tightening of the coils on the saddle-horns and the stallion, tripped and outwitted, crashed to the ground completely helpless.

Helen rode down to see the finish and came upon the scene as the Ranger finished hog-tying the captured horse and stood back to sweep the perspiration from his grimy face. Forbes was dirty also and his face was drawn with fatigue. From where she had watched the chase the work had not seemed to be particularly hard, but Helen now looked at the rocks and iron scrub around them and grasped a little of the terrific effort that the men had been putting forth.

They had driven their horses for over two hours, most of the time at full speed, across country that would seem to her dangerous to walk over. Yet she noticed that the Ranger, though he was much grimier and dustier than Forbes and had ridden three times as far, was in fuller possession of his strength than the other. Forbes was content to lean against his panting horse and rest, while the Ranger walked around the fallen, red-eyed and panic-stricken captive and looked at him carefully. Mr. Beran came riding up and a little later Bill McGhie also galloped over the rise and dismounted beside them. They all gathered around the struggling beast.

HELEN had expected to see some sleek and mighty steed of magnificent lines and muscles. She was disappointed. Forbes, too, looked at the sorrel and was disgusted. The horse was big and powerful, and his head was good, though the eyes were devilish with rage and fear.

For the rest he was a sad enough sight. His ribs and hips stuck out prominently, his mane and tail, that had flowed in the wind so picturesquely, were matted and tangled and ragged. His belly was round and sagging and his yellowish hide was muddy and full of burrs and as ragged as a donkey's. He was streaked and slimed with sweat and mud, and altogether as unhandsome an object as one could well find in a day's journey.

"And to think," ejaculated Forbes disgustedly, "that that scrub gave me such a chase! If we'd had level ground I'd have got him in a mile."

The Ranger looked at him with a peculiar smile.

"I'm not so sure of that," he said. "That horse can go some. On level ground he would have laughed at you and your racer."

Forbes laughed.

"I see him doing it," he said. "Why, he's half dead, or more than that. And he wasn't carrying weight. That isn't much of a horse after all."

"Well," said the Ranger, "whatever he is you have a half interest in him, as one of his captors. Want to sell it?"

"Sell it!" snorted Forbes. "I wouldn't rob you. You can have all of him and welcome for all of me. I give you my half."

"Thanks!" said the Ranger. "That's a pretty generous gift. I wouldn't take a thousand dollars for that horse as he lies there."

"You wouldn't get an offer from me," retorted Forbes. "I wish you joy of the devil."

The Ranger laughed and went back to the horse to make him ready for the trip to the camp. The beast was evidently very sick. His eyes were no longer fierce, but dull and spiritless. The Ranger carefully hobbled him with chain hobbles that Bill had on his saddle, putting a pair on fore and hind feet alike. Then with a rope twisted over the brute's nose for a hackamore, he cast off the ropes from the stallion's feet and tried to get the animal to rise, which proved a difficult job.

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"You had better go back to the camp and not wait for Bill and me," he said to the others. "This will be a slow job and we will probably not get in until night."

So they left him to coax the feeble captive to its feet and then to lead him carefully in the tripping hobbles over the mile or two to the camp. They had been in the camp for several hours and had supper all prepared when Bill and the Ranger finally came in and announced that they had brought the horse as far as the road, where they had left him securely bound and tied to a tree.

While they were eating, Helen leaned over to the Ranger.

"What did you put in the spring, Mr. Hyatt?" she asked. The Ranger winked solemnly at her.

"Dope," he said. "A fat chance we'd have had to corral that brute if I hadn't made him so sick that he couldn't run. There's more than one way of skinning a cat."

"There seems to be," answered Helen pityingly. "Poor thing!"

"Meaning me or the horse?" asked the Ranger.

CHAPTER XVIII

BERAN BUYS SOME SHEEP

HELEN was inclined to be rather lonely at this period. There hung over her the constant memory of the insinuations regarding her, and she would have died before she would seek again the company of the people who had been so ready to condemn her. The Verde, with its more chivalrous population, was thirty miles away by the shortest route. She was therefore separated by distance from any other companionship except that of Forbes and, at long intervals, of the Ranger. The latter was generally silent and indifferent, or at least appeared so, though at times he showed a character of levity which was not in keeping with his usual gloom.

The sheep business seemed to require little attention since, as yet, all she had to do was to pay several bills for material and the weekly salary of an engineer and his helpers who had come in from Payson. Helen had thought they were to employ the engineer over on Fossil Creek, as the Ranger had advised, but it seemed that Forbes knew a man who was a much better one and would not charge so much and, as her father at once fell in with this idea, she had made no objection, not caring much about the matter.

The man had come and looked at the spring and gone away. A couple of Mexicans had come later and begun to dig and pretty soon the bills were sent in for various shipments of lumber and cement that the engineer had ordered. Helen knew so little of the affair that she thought this quite natural and paid the bills without question.

She had plenty of time to brood and her distaste for her position grew with every hour. She was not fitted for ranch life, she told herself. She hated to cook, hated to wear calico, and hated to listen to the everlasting littleness of the conversations that she heard. She was lonely and depressed, and she felt that she would give ten years of her life to feel the hard cement pavements under her feet and see the smoke of a city once more.

And she found her thoughts dwelling on the Ranger more than was good for her. Sometimes she wondered if there could be any truth in that bitter declaration of crime he had made to her. It seemed utterly preposterous and she knew that, if he had really killed a child, he would have been far from holding a respectable position under the National Government. But that he was moody and solitary was a fact that bore out his declaration in some degree. She felt a great sympathy out of her wistful sense of equal ostracism.

Not long after the chase of the wild horse, Beran and Helen were surprised to receive callers. They came up to the gate in a buggy and shouted, and as a matter of course Beran went out to the gate to welcome them. Helen was half terrified and wholly indignant when it developed that the visitors were no others than old Moroni Lane and the schoolma'am.

"Ma'am!" said Moroni, as he entered and held out his seamed and knotty hand, which Helen hesitated to take, "I done come to apologize to you-all fer the wickedness of my son, Dave. Which he's a burnin' brand and the lake of brimstone is done yawnin' plumb wide open fer him right now. The Lord watcheth his steps and the ways of his feet is marked! He will be cut off behind the y'ears jest as soon as the Lord gets ready."

Helen was standing very straightly and

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coldly while the old man chanted his text. But she wanted to smile as she suddenly seemed to hear the Ranger's dry comments, as he would have made them.

"I hope the Lord won't be too severe upon him," was all that she found voice to say. The reason for this unexpected apology was a mystery to her.

"An' I want to say that I'm sorry that I misjudged you, Miss Beran," said Hilda hurriedly, as if repeating a distasteful lesson. "I'd ought to known better than to believe anything that lying Dave Lane told me, but he come out with that yarn so circumstantial that I couldn't help but put faith in it. But I'll raise his hair for him when I get my hands on him!"

"Now, Hilda," said Lane, with a sharply rising voice and his eyes going suddenly red, "that'll do fer you. You kin tell the young lady how sorry you are without a-cussin' Dave out thataway. Remember what the Good Book says: 'Vengeance is mine; saith the Lord. I will repay.' You let the Lord 'tend to Dave and you 'tend to your knittin' like I done told you."

"I think," said Helen, "that Hilda has some rights in the matter since it was her husband that offered me the insult. But we will let it go and drop the subject. I am glad that you do not support his conduct and I don't care about it any further than that."

"Quite right, my dear," said Moroni benevolently, though the red light had not died out of his eyes. "But you are mistaken about that marriage of Dave's. He ain't married, none whatever. He's too ornery to have the sense."

"He ain't no such a thing!" said Hilda forcibly.

"That's what I said," repeated Moroni. "He ain't married a bit. You hear me, Hilda! He ain't married a-tall! Is he?"

Hilda looked at the red eyes and swallowed hard.

"No, I reckon he ain't," she said sullenly.

"Why," exclaimed Helen, "I heard you said at the dance——"

Hilda began to wipe her eyes and gulp.

"You oughtn't to call that up on me," she said pathetically. "I had hopes, I did, and I guess I've been and made a fool out o' myself. But now I'm sorry I was so mean to you."

"There now." Helen put her arm around the girl's shoulder. "Don't you say a word more and forget all about it. I didn't think he could be so low. He wasn't worthy of you anyhow."

This appeared to give little comfort to the girl and still less to Moroni. Hilda's face writhed and the old man's eyes got very red and fiendish, but they contented themselves with grunts whose meaning was not very apparent. Moroni turned to Beran and engaged him in conversation, while Hilda exchanged general remarks of a stilted nature with Helen. Moroni seemed to know how to get on the weak side of Beran and was soon flattering him to the skies.

"IT AIN'T often," he said, "that you'll meet a tenderfoot that can come out hereaways an' give us old timers pointers on the game we done be'n a-playin' fer years. But here you-all waltzes right into the sheep business an' I'm free to confess that you've made me sit up an' take stock.

"That's a sure good idea you-all got to get water on the ranch an' if my son Nephi could hear of it he'd cuss himself black in the face that he ever parted with this place. An' I hear you are lookin' around careful for your stock. Ain't a-goin' to fall fer the first feller that wants to sell a bunch of half breds, hey?"

"No, sir!" said Beran emphatically, as his own acumen was borne in upon him. "There was some talk of buying sheep on a mortgage from the Baker outfit over to Prescott, but I wouldn't stand for that. I'm too wise to pay that interest. No, Mr. Lane, I'm too good a financier to resort to the common, crude methods in vogue among these stockmen. My game is to look around and pick up a good band of ewes and give notes secured by the entire assets of the company. That way I can save about ten per cent. interest on the purchase price."

"Sho, now!" ejaculated Lane. "I'm a Gentile if you ain't right. Why, I'd never ha' thought o' that, but now I can see that it's the best way. And o' course the feller that takes the notes ain't got no kick comin'. He gets better security fer his money, now don't he?"

"Of course," said Beran importantly. "It's a much better method all around than the crude financing of the ordinary ranchman."

"It sure looks as if the Lord had done give you a heap o' wisdom, thataway," sighed

Moroni enviously. "I reckon you-all will make a heap out o' this sheep business an' I wish you luck, even if what's your meat is my poison. It's funny enough to an outsider, I reckon, that you-all should git the best o' me after I be'n in the business since I was weaned. But new blood beats us old timers, an' my boy Dave ain't no good, like I be'n tellin' you."

"Why," said Beran, "aren't you having any luck?"

"No," said Moroni, with resignation. "You goin' into the business thisaway has done cut down my range until I ain't got room fer all my stock. I don't hold no hard feelin', but I wish there was some way that I could git rid of five thousand fine ewes that I ain't got no range fer. The sheepmen around here knows I'm up ag'in' it an' they won't give more'n two dollars a head fer them and the Lord knows they'd be a loss to to me at five. But I ain't got no choice, I reckon. 'The Lord giveth an' the Lord taketh away. Blessed be the name of the Lord!'"

"Two dollars!" cried Beran, "Why, it's robbery! I wouldn't sell at that if I were you."

"What am I to do?" sighed the old man. "I got to sell or leave 'em starve an' I wouldn't do that even to no dumb critter. An' they're sure fine ewes at that."

"I'll give you four dollars for them myself," said Beran hotly. "It's a shame that people would take advantage of a man that is down."

"I reckon they wouldn't suit you." Lane shook his head. "You'll be startin' in light with half-bred Shropshires, I reckon, an' these is thoroughbred merinos an' extra fine at that. I be'n a long time buildin' up my grades, I can tell you."

"I'm starting with the best," said Beran. "None of this halfbreed stuff for us! I'll tell you what I'll do, Moroni. I'll take the sheep off your hands if Bill and Helen consent, and pay you five thousand dollars down and the other fifteen thousand in notes at six months, a year and two years, with privilege of renewal. The notes will pay eight per cent interest."

"Well, I don't know," debated Moroni. "It's mighty generous of you, but I guess I have to see Dave about it. Be you goin' to the party tomorrow night?"

"What party?" asked Helen curiously. She did not want her father to go to any more parties.

"It ain't a ladies' party," said Moroni, with a roguish grin. "It's a party given by this feller Forbes. He's done sent in a lot of refreshments an' he's entertainin' the voters because he's goin' to run fer Congressional Delegate an' is naturally anxious to git the right fellers elected to the Legislature. I reckon I'll go an' sample his whisky, but I ain't sure I'll vote fer him."

"I haven't been invited," said Beran.

"No one is," replied Moroni. "The liquor is just sent in an' the word passed around an' ever'body just comes a-runnin'. We meet down in the schoolhouse tomorrow night an' them that's late are goin' to be dry."

"I don't affect liquor much," said Beran doubtfully.

"Well, it will be fun fer ever'body an' you better come. You don't have to drink it, though liquor is one of the Lord's good things. I was thinkin' I might settle this business of the sheep down there."

"In that case I might make it a point to be present," and Beran smiled in the sense of his own importance as a figure in the sheep industry.

Helen, who was talking to Hilda Petersen with some restraint and an uncomfortable feeling of antagonism, had listened with a corner of her mind to the conversation of the men. She had been rather favorably impressed by the openness and candor of old Moroni. He seemed to be in sharp contrast to the hulking son and the sullen girl who was so palpably concealing resentment and hate of the Berans. As is the way of some women, Hilda disguised her real feelings under a fulsome cordiality which did not deceive. It was with some relief that Helen saw her guest making preparations to leave in answer to the signal from the old man.

"*Do* come and see me!" gushed Hilda, with a plainly artificial smile that was almost like a snarl. "And you know I am terrible sorry for that awful mistake, my dear. Honest, I could just kill that scoundrel fer lettin' me in fer that!"

"Don't think of it any more, please," said Helen. "It's really of no importance and I wish to forget it."

"Well, I'll see that there ain't any more talk among those cats at the village," assured Hilda. "You can go right down there after this, my dear, and you'll never hear a syllable uttered that could offend you, or my name isn't Hilda Petersen."

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"Thank you," said Helen coldly. "Good-by!"

Lane patted her on the back as he went out.

"You'll have to marry a good Mormon," he chuckled. "You belong in the Covenant among the chosen of the Lord."

Helen looked into the eyes that shone so redly and felt a sharp revulsion. The man was inexpressibly mean-looking, and his shifty glance was akin to that of the insane.

"I think I will stay single and be an old maid," she said.

Lane seemed to think this a great joke, and went out laughing with suspicious heartiness.

WHEN they were gone Mr. Beran turned to his daughter, who had sunk into her chair and was gazing gloomily at the baseburner stove.

"That old Mr. Lane is different from his sons, isn't he?" he remarked. "Fine old type of the pioneer, I call him. Shrewd and capable, but not up to the latest methods in the business world. Honest as the day is long, and unsuspecting of guile in the people with whom he does business. Really I felt a little conscience-stricken for seizing the opportunity to take advantage of the poor old man.

"But business is business and I certainly will be fairer to him than these unscrupulous stockmen who would only offer him two dollars a head for his sheep. Undoubtedly they are worth five, but I am justified, I think, in getting them for four."

"I should think you were," said Helen dryly. "But I would not be too sure that you are getting the best of the bargain until Bill has seen the sheep. If he says they are all right, I suppose that it will be a good purchase. But I wish you would leave these Lanes alone and deal with those people that the Ranger mentioned."

"Why, you agreed perfectly with Forbes's arguments the other day," remonstrated her father.

"I know," said Helen wearily. "But I have thought about it since and I am a little doubtful."

Her father folded his hands impressively and leaned back in his chair.

"And what are your reasons, my dear?" said he.

"I don't know," said Helen. "I don't suppose I have any. It's just an intuition with me."

"That's the way with a woman," ejaculated Mr. Beran scornfully. "They never have a reason. Now we have plenty of reasons for following Forbes's advice. To convince you I will run over them."

"Oh, don't!" said Helen. "I've heard them all before and I know what they are. I acknowledge that it seems all right and I don't care what you do. But, father, I wish you could arrange it so that we could go away from here and get back to the city."

"My dear," said Beran patiently, "I must look after my business."

"I know," sighed Helen. "Well, if you go to this party please don't drink anything while you are transacting business, and don't buy any sheep until Bill sees them."

Then she went to bed and lay awake a long time, wondering sadly if she would ever win back to civilization and comfort again. Her father remained up and indignantly assured himself that he didn't need Bill McGhie's help to buy sheep and that he wouldn't go out of his way to consult that ignoramus. But, with the memory of certain severe reproaches from Helen upon other occasions when he had relied on his own business judgment, he decided that he would not say anything to her about his confidence in himself.

He came back from the orgy of the following night free from the signs of intoxication. This relieved Helen, and when she asked him if he had done anything about the sheep her tone was mild.

"Yes," said Beran. "We decided to buy them, Bill and I did. The notes will be ready to sign in the morning as soon as Forbes has them made out. Forbes and Lane," he added virtuously, "were too drunk to do much last night."

Helen was satisfied so long as Bill had been a party to the negotiations; but she neglected to ask how sober the latter had been, which was just as well for her peace of mind. As a matter of fact, when Beran had arrived at the schoolhouse he found a number of men, among whom was Bill, in an advanced state of joy and lubrication.

As Beran did not think that Bill's assistance was necessary, he took the matter in his own hands and made the agreement.

Forbes brought the notes the next day and they were signed by Helen, though she had an uneasy feeling that she ought to ask

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he Ranger about the matter before she consented. Still, Forbes was reliable and the thing seemed all right. They had to buy sheep, and it seemed that the cash payment was not to be made until the stock was turned over to Bill when the sheep moved from the Reserve in the Fall. So Helen signed the notes, each for five thousand dollars, and dismissed the matter from her mind. But her uneasiness was revived when Bill came to consult her about a trip to Prescott to purchase some rams. She asked Bill about the episode at the party and Bill was as blank as a wall about it.

"Me help buy any sheep!" he said. "Say, Miss Helen, I was too pickled to buy a cigaroot. I sort o' remember hearing your pa say something about some sheep and old man Lane, but I can't spot the connection just now. But I didn't buy no sheep, I'll make oath to that."

"Well," sighed Helen, "I don't believe any of us are fit to run this business, but I hope I am wrong. Let us trust that the sheep somebody bought are all right and that this Mr. Baker who has so recklessly entrusted his money to us will not lose all of it."

"If Forbes says the deal was all right, I reckon it was," said Bill. "He's a lawyer, ain't he?"

"He is," said Helen, "but that is no sign that he knows a sheep from a gate post. Besides, it seems that no one has actually *seen* these wonderful animals."

"I'll see the rams *I* buy, you can gamble on that," said Bill.

When he was sober he entirely forgot that he was ever an underling and was now rapidly even losing his pessimism, in the responsibility of his new character.

"And, Miss Helen, I wish you'd look into that business of the corrals and dippin'-vat. They've sent a lot of lumber in here an' it don't look to me like it's the right stuff for that work. And what are them oilers aimin' to do up there by the spring?"

"I don't know," said Helen. "I'm only running the financial end of the business between the times I spend in the household duties, and I can't run the engineering and the building, which I don't know a thing about anyway."

"Well, you'd better call your pa's attention to it," Bill advised as he departed. Helen laughed after him.

"What would be the good of that?" she remarked. "Of course father knows all about those things. He knows all about everything, but the trouble is that he knows it all wrong. Dear, dear! Why did I ever get mixed up in this thing anyway? I wish I had never seen Arizona."

Then she went into the house and resumed her distasteful labors without any further complaint. But whenever she tried to think vividly of the joys of urban existence, somehow or other she found her mind dwelling on the inevitably jogging figure of the Ranger, with his hands crossed idly on his saddle-horn.

It seemed to Helen that they two had something in common, even though the man did avoid her. Both were outcasts; both seeking refuge in solitude.

But if the man in the blue jersey and the leather chaps chose his exile from inclination, such was not the case with her. She wanted the joy of living and companionship, and longed for it the more that Fate seemed determined to bar her from it. If there were only one person on whom she might throw her burdens, it would relieve her loneliness. And she wanted to share the burdens of that rider on the Mountain, though she told herself that she did only from a natural feeling of sympathy.

CHAPTER XIX

THE RANGER DOES SOME HERDING

THE Ranger rode past the ranch the next day, coming from Pine, where he had evidently spent the night. Helen came out to the door in answer to his hail and the man noted with eyes that were a little wistful that, though she was in apron and cap, her appearance was as dainty as if she were prepared for a ball. She flushed a little at his approving glance.

"Was there anything you wanted?" she asked demurely.

"Yes," said the Ranger, "but I am afraid it does me little good to want things like that. Is Bill McGhie around?"

"He has gone to Prescott."

"Is your father in?"

"He has gone with Bill. There has been word from that Mr. Baker—a letter."

"I was wondering if you had heard from him," said the Ranger. "May I ask what it was about?"

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"It was very queer," said Helen. "Bill brought the letter last night. Won't you come in while I tell you about it?"

The Ranger dismounted and sat on the edge of the stoop and Helen sat down beside him.

"I was longing to get out of Pine only yesterday," Helen began. "But I didn't think that this Mr. Baker would be the god from the machine."

"I know Baker," said the Ranger, "but that is the first time I ever heard it intimated that there was anything godly about him."

"He is perfectly heavenly," asserted Helen. "He wrote that there would have to be an office maintained in Prescott this Winter and that I would be expected to manage it. He proposed that I be voted a sufficient salary to maintain me there and sent Bill the proxy for voting his stock on the matter. Now, wasn't that divine of him?"

The Ranger did not seem to be very much impressed with Baker's generosity.

"Perfectly all right!" he said, with a slight smile. "And I reckon you will be mighty glad to get out of here, won't you?"

Helen shook her head with some perplexity.

"Really, I don't think I will," she said. "I'll miss the Mountain and Bill and the Bishop. It hasn't been very pleasant lately, but I am afraid to go. I don't know enough to conduct that business. I will make blunders just as I have here."

"What blunders have you made?" asked Hyatt.

Helen told him about the purchase of the sheep from the Lanes and the notes that had been signed. The Ranger frowned a little.

"And Forbes advised this, did he?"

"He seemed to think it was a good bargain. But father really proposed it and Mr. Forbes had very little to do with it, except that he strongly advised our buying on notes instead of paying the exorbitant interest demanded on mortgages on live stock. That seemed quite reasonable to me."

"You ought to have bought your sheep from Baker," said the Ranger. "As a stockholder, he would have every reason to give the best terms and treat you fairly. As for the notes, the reason Lane was so anxious to take them was that his security was gilt-edged then. If he sold you a lot of poor sheep that will be lost during the Winter, you are liable to the amount of your stock for the price of them. They were negotiable, of course?"

"I don't know what that is," said Helen, feeling quite bewildered and despairing at her lack of knowledge.

"I can guess that they were," said the Ranger, with a grin. "You might have a defense on the ground of fraud, but they will get them discounted as soon as possible. The notes were dated from the day of the sale, I suppose?"

"I believe Mr. Forbes said that that was the legal way," explained Helen.

"Oh, perfectly legal, of course," remarked the Ranger. "Especially as Forbes says so. He horns into this from more directions than I can keep track of. Did he advise the hiring of this man Morgan from Payson, instead of the fellow I told you of?"

"He doesn't charge as much," said Helen weakly.

"And hasn't done a thing but waste your money," added the Ranger. "When I came past the spring I found the work in a mess and those Mexicans up there dead drunk. I took the liberty of firing them for you, though they objected and questioned my authority. If I were you I would inform Mr. Morgan that his services will not be required any longer and get the man I advised in the first place. Bill told me that the stuff ordered for corrals was no good either."

Helen was aghast.

"Ah!" she cried. "And we have spent so much on that stuff! Oh, dear! What on earth shall I do, Mr. Hyatt?"

"For one thing," said Hyatt, "I'd do just the opposite of what Forbes advises. Or wait! I'll take that back. If Forbes wants you to do *one* thing I'd do it. But you go to Prescott and, if you seem to be getting into hot water down there, let me know and don't do anything until you hear from me. Will you promise me that?"

Helen sighed gratefully.

"Can you doubt it!" she said. "You have been such a blessing to me, Mr. Hyatt."

"The first thing *I* know," growled the Ranger, "I'll be usurping those divine honors that belong to Baker. Well, I don't want to make myself a curse instead of a blessing, but I guess you are a little lonely here, aren't you?" Helen nodded.

"So am I," said the Ranger.

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"But you wish to be lonely, don't you?" he said, a little plaintively. "And I don't. Yet I can't very well be anything else—now."

"I know," said the Ranger. "I don't care so much for it as I once thought I did, either. I am going to be in Prescott some time this Winter. We are laid off during the cold months, you know."

"I didn't know," said Helen. "But I am glad that you will be there. You will come to see me and give me advice, won't you?"

"Will a duck swim?" asked the Ranger. "Well, I must be off on my weary rounds. There is a sheep herder up on the Mountain that I want to remonstrate with. By the way, do you like to cook?"

"I *hate* it!" exclaimed the girl. Then, as the abruptness of the question struck her—"Why, Mr. Hyatt?"

The range rider shook his head slowly, disconsolately.

"I regret it very much," he said, "because I had hoped that I would some day have the opportunity to eat a meal prepared by you. But no such luck, I reckon."

Helen flushed.

"I really didn't think you cared to come here," she said, "or I would have asked you long ago. I don't want you to think I am ungrateful to you. I really would enjoy having you, but you are so queer! I thought you didn't care to know any one. And sometimes you seem to be making fun of me. I—I don't like it!"

"Why, Miss Helen," the Ranger exclaimed, "I didn't mean to offend you, really! I was just fishing shamelessly and openly for an invitation. I won't come at all if you don't want me to, and I'll do anything to induce you to forgive me. I'll tell you what I'll do now! I'll even make you a present of that mousehound! Think of that, will you!"

"Oh! Go along about your business," scolded Helen.

Then she laughed.

"I'll expect you to supper on Sunday," she said, as she turned back to the house. "And you may bring the mousehound with you—but as a guest, not as a gift."

"The mousehound will be desolated to know that you scorn him," grinned the Ranger as he gathered up his reins. Helen waved to him from the door as he rode away.

THE Ranger wended his stately way toward the top of the plateau, and when he had reached that point turned east toward the Blue Ridge where rumor in the shape of a complaining cow puncher had it that some of Lane's sheep were ranging outside of their allotment. Skirting a long ridge, he heard a plaintive bleat and, glancing up, saw a fine wether perched forlornly on a ledge. Range law prescribes that stray sheep are anybody's find, for none can live overnight away from dogs and herder, on account of coyotes and timber wolves.

So he shot the beast with his revolver and, after roughly dressing it, tied it to his saddle and rode on, giving thanks for a timely supply of meat. He did not fail to notice that Lane's mark was painted on the wool.

Within a mile he came upon the band from which this animal had strayed, finding it, as reported, far out of the proper range. The Ranger hailed the herder and questioned him as to his disregard of frequent warnings. He was a Basque who, the Ranger knew, understood Spanish and some English, but the fellow assumed an impregnable stupidity and only referred the officer, in his own barbarous dialect, to the "*Capitán.*"

To a request for the whereabouts of his employer he opposed the same stolid ignorance, and though the Ranger knew it to be assumed he could not penetrate it. In disgust the latter ordered him to get his flock on the move toward its proper range at once. The Basque again refused to understand.

"If you don't," the Ranger threatened, "I'll do it myself, and if I do, they'll go fast."

"No sabe!" was the invincible reply.

The Ranger turned grim. He whistled shrilly for the mousehound, who had been lurking well out of the way of the herder's dogs. But as soon as the trusting brute appeared these others made a rush for him. The mousehound made a quick and discreet retreat, while the Basque grinned derisively. The Ranger drew his six-shooter.

"Call in your dogs," he said softly. "If they interfere at all I shoot them."

"No sabe!" shrugged the Basque.

The Ranger, at his answer, calmly winged one of the dogs. The beast's dying howl aroused the man like a galvanic shock. He sprang fiercely at the Ranger, waving his

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arms and screaming Spanish and Basque imprecations, larded with a few English oaths. The remaining dog flew promptly to his aid. But now the mousehound covered himself with glory. Though no credit had ever been given him for any virtue but abiding affection, he evidently harbored a streak of heroism in his character. Overcoming his constitutional aversion to war at sight of the peril of his master, the faithful beast charged in and went to the mat with the surviving sheep dog.

The two men, with one accord, suspended hostilities and watched the combat. The sheep dog endeavored to fight wolfishly, slashing and leaping away, but the mousehound, ignoring all rules in his ignorance, dashed blindly in, fighting with teeth, claws, body and tail; bearing down the surprised canine and rolling over and over with him, locked in one inextricable, dusty, whirling chaos of fur, feet, legs, tails and howls.

The Basque urged on his champion with shrill screams of *patois*, while the Ranger whooped on the mousehound as well as he was able between the rolling spasms of mirth that convulsed him. It was all over in a moment. The unorthodox methods of the Ranger's brute bewildered the sheep dog and sapped his courage. In a lull of the dance he extricated himself and fled over the hills, his mournful howls coming faintly and reproachfully back from the far distance.

The Basque, too, lost his courage when his dog fled. He went over to the beast the Ranger had killed and looked down at it, swearing and mourning over the cur. The Ranger felt little pity for the man, though he regretted the necessity of killing the faithful dog. But regret was no part of his task at present and he turned to call the mousehound, setting the animal on the sheep, a task which it welcomed as a game.

Unskilful as both of them were, they soon had the flock on the run, headed toward the ridge. The Ranger was angry and drove them mercilessly, determined to make these lawbreakers see that he was no longer to be trifled with. The panic-stricken animals dashed wildly after their leaders, while the Rider galloped on one side and the mousehound on the other.

As they dashed past a line of blazes that marked Lane's allotment, he saw a dingy tent near another flock and swung the crazy mob toward their relatives. They came charging down upon the herd, met and rushed over a couple of dogs who threw themselves gallantly in the way, and piled frantically in one disastrous, exploding mass of bleating sheep, yelling dogs and plunging horse, upon the startled flock. For ten minutes a scattered, milling, tumultuous riot of dogs, men and sheep filled the landscape before the galloping horseman and the delirious dogs could aid the herdsman in restoring a semblance of order.

Finally the Ranger drew up his panting mount before the man and listened admiringly to his steady, monotonous flow of profanity in three languages. As he gave attentive ear to this discourse, he became aware that the mousehound, enthusiastically continuing his awkward efforts, had brought down the combined attack of the sheep dogs upon himself.

He was valiant with remembrance of his recent victory and foolishly stood his ground. He would have been quickly cut to pieces if the Ranger had not spurred over and lifted him out of danger by the scruff of his neck. His master then bade the profuse shepherd a regretful farewell and turned to depart.

"I shall be back this way again soon," he remarked, "and if your sheep are over the line again, they'll be driven that way plumb off the Reserve. I'm some tired of you fellows."

He turned and rode away, the mousehound whimpering defiance at his late foes from the security of the saddle-horn. But they had not moved far when they heard a shout and turned back to see Dave Lane trotting rapidly down the slope, with the master of the murdered dog and routed sheep clinging to the skirts of his saddle.

"Hey, you!" he shouted. "What you doin' to these sheep?"

And he spluttered vicious curses, quite beside himself. A carbine hung under his stirrup leather and at sight of this the Ranger dropped his right hand at full length, where it hung with the fingers upon a line with the butt of his revolver, and rode closer. He was too wary to be potted by a thirty-thirty from beyond effective pistol range. His face was a little drawn, but otherwise as expressionless as usual. There was no fear in his eyes, but rather a look of regret.

"These your sheep?" he asked, a little wearily.

"Yes, you ——!"

And the names that he called the Ranger were unbelievably vile. The slow blood crept into the rider's face and stained his neck.

"That will do," he said sharply. "I've heard enough of that. I'm waiting for you to start this dance and I'm getting impatient at the delay. Now cut loose if you want action!"

The Ranger's fingers were twitching at the grip of his six-shooter and there was a flame in his eyes that caused Dave's oaths to die away into a choking mutter. He gulped and the blood receded from his face, leaving it yellow under the tan.

"I—I ain't goin' to start nothin' when you got the drop," he stuttered. "But I'm a-goin' to get your job! I'll report this here work! There'll be a new Ranger down here pretty soon, —— yuh!"

His voice rose to a shriek of crazed rage.

"Go ahead and report," said the Ranger, the glitter of battle dying in his eyes. "But while you're at it you'd better get ready to move your *varrigas* off this Reserve. I'll recommend to the Supervisor that your permit be canceled if there is a bit more trouble from you and your herders. Now I'm going, and if you start anything else I'll come back here and butcher you a plenty."

THE Ranger counted on Dave Lane's disposition to avoid reckless action, and was fool enough not to take the man's rifle away from him. He counted on too much, as it happened. He had ridden perhaps a hundred yards when his atavistic instinct manifested itself in an increasing chill that ran up his spine, and persuaded him to relax his attitude of proud unconcern enough to glance back over his shoulder. The glance was quite enough. He tumbled sidewise out of his saddle just as a soft-nosed bullet sailed through the space he had so lately occupied. The mousehound promptly tumbled on top of him. What with catching his spur rowel in the cinch and being busy in preventing the panicky dog from boring a hole in his neck with its nose, while quieting the plunging horse—to whose reins he had tenaciously clung—it was some time before he could extricate himself and, covered by the horse, rise with six-shooter extended.

He was not to fight a long-range duel under such a handicap, however. When he cautiously raised his head above the horse's rump, he caught a view of Dave Lane galloping across the ridge, turning his head, before he vanished, to see what damage had been done. The Ranger realized that Dave must suppose that he had killed him. He had an inclination to follow the man, but knew that the fugitive's horse was fresher than his own, and on reflection recalled that his weapon was also better.

As it did not exactly suit him to be killed out of hand, he mounted his horse painfully and rode off, shaking his fist at the staring sheep herders. He regretted their presence as eye witnesses, since they would inform Dave that he was not dead. The Ranger wanted to let Dave go back to Pine and tell the lie that would hide his attempt and anticipated some enjoyment from confronting him unexpectedly. But since the Basques had seen him recover, that recreation would be denied him.

CHAPTER XX

THE RANGER COMES TO DINNER

WHATEVER Helen's feelings toward the Ranger were, she was quite impatient at the obtuseness of Miss Hilda Petersen on the following Sunday afternoon. The latter had come to call. From her manner it seemed that the courtesy was distasteful to her; yet, in the fashion of small communities, she stayed and gossiped diligently, while Helen fidgeted and hoped she would leave before the guest of the evening appeared.

But her hopes were doomed to disappointment. It was not until the sound of the Ranger's voice objurgating the mousehound could be heard outside the door that Miss Petersen evinced any intention of leaving. Miss Petersen hated Helen with a still and deep hate, but she would not break a sociable call off short if it involved association with the foul fiend himself.

But the Ranger's tones had more effect than hate or the hints of Helen. No sooner had that voice sounded than Hilda arose with a frown.

"Is that there Ranger comin' here to see you-all?" she demanded. "Well, I reckon tastes differ and I guess I'll trot along. I may not be so uppish as some folks and I don't wish any one any bad luck, but I hope Dave Lane gets that fellow right."

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"From what I have heard," said Helen, "Mr. Lane is quite capable of making the attempt."

"Well, why shouldn't he?" demanded Hilda as she fussed with her hat. "Sheep killer! Just because he wears a Government badge he thinks he owns the Territory. He's a grafter and a thief, he is! He stole one of Dave's sheep just before Dave had that run-in with him. Dave says it was hanging on his saddle when he came up."

"You seem to have resumed your intimacy with Mr. Lane since his late indiscretions," suggested Helen sweetly. "But I don't believe that I would be so ready to credit his word."

Hilda blazed up at once. She had opened the door and found that the Ranger was not outside, having gone to put up his horse.

"I'd believe him a sight quicker than I would that Range Rider," she shrilled. "He's a whole lot better fellow than that Government thief. And just you wait and see what happens to him before Dave gets through with him. He'll get a plenty, he will! And he *ought* to be killed! Maybe you think *I* don't know why he's ridin' range up here, but I reckon Forbes let it out, all right. And I reckon Dave Lane stands up pretty well alongside o' *him!*"

"Humph!"

The Ranger's quiet voice interrupted the flow of Hilda's indignant opinions.

"Now, *why* am I riding range, Miss Petersen, if I may ask? And what has the Honorable Forbes let out of the bag? Go on and tell us, for I am sure that Miss Beran will be glad to know of my crimes and misdemeanors."

Ordinarily Hilda would have shrunk from tattling her gossip in that presence, but the slights to Dave had maddened her loyal soul. She blazed out upon the Ranger.

"He done told us how you killed a poor little baby over there in Prescott on Pioneer Day," she screamed. "Don't *you* dare to say nothin' against Dave Lane, you murderer! Get drunk and kill an infant, will you? No wonder you sneak around in them woods and don't dare to show your face back where you belong! I don't blame you, I don't!"

"That's quite evident!" said the Ranger, as she flounced down the path. He turned to Helen. His face was a little drawn and his eyes were pleading. She was horror-struck at this grisly accusation, remembering that it was similar to one he had once brought against himself and which she had disbelieved as a jest.

But she could not believe it even now. With her eyes begging him to deny it she turned to face him.

"It isn't true?" she said, with clasped hands.

The Ranger bowed his head.

"I'm afraid it is," he answered simply.

The girl felt her head reel with the horror of it. The grave, gentle man who stood before her and acknowledged this awful thing must be lying to shield some one else, for some reason, however wild and improbable—any reason at all. At any rate he was—he *must* be lying. The thing was simply outside the bounds of possibility.

"I can't believe it," she said, with dull inadequacy.

"I thank you."

But he shook his head with weary iteration of the fact.

"It was an accident!" she insisted stubbornly.

The Ranger sighed.

"They are kind enough to call it that—but I was at fault. I knew and went ahead. And I was drunk—or near it."

"But you didn't intend to do it!" wailed Helen. "Can't you tell me about it? It *can't* be true."

The Ranger shook his head again.

"It would do no good," he said. "I think I had better go—and I told this to you myself, if you will be so kind as to remember. I was weak to accept your disbelief, but—it was very sweet to me."

Helen had sat down upon the steps and hidden her face in her hands.

"Wait!" she said peremptorily. The Ranger waited meekly.

For some moments she sat there and endeavored to adjust this thing to her conception of the man. The fact seemed to be established, but whenever she faced it her will rose up and stubbornly discredited the assertion. The whole character of the man as she knew him cried out that there was more behind that remained untold and would explain the thing.

It must have been an accident—others had said that it was one. She clung to that acknowledgment desperately. In her mind, despite the Ranger's confession, a

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refrain of "He did not do it! He did not do it!" submerged all impulse to belief. After a while she looked up at him.

"I think," she said, "that it is very easy to place a wrong interpretation on events, and I have experienced that fact myself only lately. You may say that you did such a thing, but I don't think I wish to judge you on your own word.

"Besides, you have been kind to me, and the least I can do in return is to be loyal to you. I do not care what you or any one else says; I will not believe that you have done anything so horrible, or, if you have been at fault, then you have made amends. If you were a cannibal, still I know that you saved me from that man!"

The Ranger's face lit up wonderfully, and she saw in it a trace of that spirit of levity that she now interpreted as mere light-heartedness diverted from its natural manifestation. She smiled into his eyes with confidence and held out her hand. He took it and kissed it swiftly.

Helen flushed.

"I think I had better begin to get the dinner ready," she said, with some confusion.

"Not yet," said the Ranger. "I want to tell you that you have lightened that memory more than you can know. But there are other misdemeanors to my credit and you ought to know of them, also. Miss Hilda was good enough to tell you that I stole one of Dave's sheep, I believe. Unfortunately, I believe that is the truth."

"You stole one of Dave's sheep," repeated Helen slowly. The Ranger nodded.

"Where is it?" asked Helen.

"I took it back to my camp and hung it in a cool place where it would keep," said the Ranger. "I need the meat."

Helen pondered this for a moment. She knew that the ranchers often made free with each other's property with no thought of giving or taking offense; but she was, of course, ignorant of the unwritten law of the range regarding stray sheep. Still, she knew from the Ranger's attitude that there was nothing serious in this accusation, and felt that if there was she had already given him such a large measure of trust that a little more would not strain her charity much.

"I wish you had brought it down with you," she said. "I think I would enjoy eating some of that sheep. But if you have confessed all of your crimes, perhaps you will come in and help me with the cooking."

"You know that I am a boss cook," said the Ranger.

He seemed, all of a sudden, quite light-hearted. They went into the kitchen and set about the tasks that Helen had once hated, but which now seemed not at all disagreeable to her. Something had given new beauty to the stove and placed a halo of romance about the shoulder of venison that the Ranger had brought down to her father a day or two before. But Helen was curious to know more of her guest.

"THERE is quite a prominent family of Hyatts in Los Angeles," she said. "I have wondered if you could be connected with that branch."

The Ranger was tying an apron upon himself and did not look up from his waist.

"I believe I am one of them," he said, casually. "This toga seems to be out of style, to me."

"I mean the family that are in the railroad business," said Helen. "The Ogden & Western Hyatts. They are very rich."

"Well, my uncle is President of the Ogden & Western or was, the last I heard of him," said the Ranger. "I also believe he is afflicted with wealth. I belong to the stock growers' side of the family. We own the Santa Clara Ranch and a few other properties of that nature. Also a few mines, if I remember correctly."

Helen felt a little fear strike her.

"But that is the richer branch of the two!" she said. "And you are one of that family?"

"I am one of the sharers in my father's estate, which was left in trust for us," said the Ranger. "He had feudal notions and tied it up as long as he could, for all lives then in being and twenty-one years thereafter, so that we could not dissipate it. Not that I would get rid of it. I earn a salary as a Ranger which goes a long way toward satisfying my needs."

It did not make Helen any happier to know that the young man was a member of a rich family. It seemed to put a gulf between them as wide as the contrast between her own poverty and his affluence. Perhaps the Ranger sensed something of this, for he began to talk of himself more freely than she had any right to expect.

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"I used to act as foreman of the Santa Clara properties," he said, as he began to peel some potatoes. "The cow punchers rather resented it at first, but they became reconciled when I developed socialistic tendencies and cursed my father for a conscienceless plutocrat who would not distribute his wealth among the toilers, beginning with myself, whom he paid a most inadequate salary. They forgave me my college education even, when they saw how bitter I was at the wrongs of the proletariat —and myself. I wasn't such a poor foreman, either, in spite of the education.

"However, I got an acute attack of patriotism in '98 and went off to the War with the Rough Riders and sat in Tampa while the rest of the boys took San Juan and showed the Regulars how to fight. I was too good a man with horses to waste on the firing-line, so I had to stay behind and curry the steeds while the rest gathered glory.

"Then, after they were disbanded, I enlisted in the new Volunteer Army and was stationed in Havana for a time. That was during the attempt to make the place sanitary, and, one day, some fool surgeon got the notion that all the yellow fever was caused by mosquitos and, when nobody would believe him, he got mad and said he'd show them. So he talked a lot of us into making ourselves subjects for mosquito feed.

"Some of the lucky ones he put under mosquito netting and exposed in pest houses. The rest he kept away from the patients, but let all sorts of mosquitos bite us. We thought we had all the best of it because it did seem that that surgeon was dotty in the head like a fish, but we didn't feel so smart when he turned out to be right. The fellows that had to put on pest-house clothes and sleep in beds in which yellow jack patients had passed out, all of them came up smiling, though scared nearly to death, while we who had chuckled to think that a measly bug could give a man the plague all got the fever and several of them died, including the surgeon.

"I was one of the unlucky skeptics," sighed the Ranger. "And, take it from me, I sure did have some fever. I reckon about the biggest and blood-thirstiest mosquito of them all must have dined off me."

Helen turned sharply on him.

"You may make light of that," she asserted warmly, "but if I had done such a thing, I would consider that I had won the forgiveness of every one for almost any crime."

"But I hadn't committed any crime at that time," said the Ranger. "I was just an invalid officer who was worked over by those Army doctors and several others as if to make up for playing it low-down on us by that time. They pulled me through, though most of the others kicked in, but I wasn't very useful to the world when I left the hospital. They gave me a medal, but they couldn't give me back my strength. So I went back to the ranch and took to getting restored."

"And you were!" said Helen. "It would have been too bad if you had failed to get well again after that."

The Ranger winced.

"I thought that I was well," he said. "But I wasn't. I was a braggart and a fool, and a curse came upon me. Now, by all the gods, I'll not go back to my place until I have proved that I *am* a man again."

Helen understood that he was unwilling to say anything more.

"You have proved it to me," she said.

"Thank you!"

The Ranger smiled gratefully at her.

"But it still remains to prove it to my own satisfaction. But the talk grows morbid, and I am tired of being in that condition. Let us make merry instead."

CHAPTER XXI

BITTER DAYS FOR HELEN

HELEN went to Prescott not long after this, leaving Bill to receive the sheep they had bought from Lane, when the animals should come off the Reserve. It had come over Helen that she knew very little of the sheep business, and she was afflicted with a feeling that the affairs of the company had been so badly mishandled as to promise almost certain disaster. Realizing that she was expected to be something more than a puppet and should be competent to restrain her father, she got all the works on sheep-raising and ranch management that she could find and devoted herself to what seemed a hopeless and endless course of study. Yet the complacent Mr. Baker seemed satisfied, though she had sent him a statement of the affairs of the concern

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which did not seem to be at all reassuring to herself.

Her new office, which was a room in the house where she and her father boarded, was dignified one day by the presence of a caller who gave his name as a Mr. Meadows and presented a receipt signed by Bill McGhie for five thousand ewes delivered by Moroni Lane. There was a penciled scrawl upon it, however. It read, "Hold this up a while," and was in Bill's hand. Helen knew nothing of what it meant, but she had learned caution at last, and so she asked about it.

"I believe Mr. McGhie at first declined to receive the sheep and only did so after Mr. Lane had threatened to leave them on the desert to starve," explained Mr. Meadows quite frankly. "Finally he did take them, but added that notation to his receipt for some reason or other.

"With that I am not concerned, Miss Beran. I act for my client, Mr. Lane, and must insist that the terms of his contract with your company be fulfilled. Mr. Lane has delivered the sheep, as he agreed. You are now required to pay five thousand dollars in cash and to deliver the notes executed at the time of entering into this agreement, together with the mortgage securing the same."

"Mortgage!" cried Helen. "Why, it was to avoid a mortgage that we agreed to give notes!"

"But the notes must be secured in some way," explained Meadows patiently. "It was to avoid a mortgage upon the sheep alone, as I understand it, that these notes were to be drawn. Of course, if the lien was confined to the live stock the interest rate would be higher in proportion to the risk. I have here the proper papers which I will ask you to examine and, if they are correctly drawn, have them executed."

Meadows spoke with indulgent patience, as one who had no illusions about a woman's knowledge of business, but was prepared to show her ignorance every consideration. Helen was in a state of hesitation in which she did not know what to do. It seemed that she was entering an endless maze from which she could never hope to escape. She longed to have the Ranger at her side to tell her what to do. But he was probably riding his endless round far away on the Black Mesa.

"But if I refuse to sign?" she asked.

Mr. Meadows smiled and shook his head deprecatingly.

"I would regret the necessity of an appeal to the courts," he said, "but in my client's interest I would have to take such action as would best protect him. I would hate to go into a court of equity and sue to compel specific performance on this contract."

Helen wondered if she could gain time to reach the Ranger before this man appealed to the courts and did all those mysterious and horrible things. Maybe the court would make her pay all the money at once, which she could not do. It seemed to Helen that there was more to lose by refusing to pay than by complying with the demands and trusting to find some way out before the notes fell due.

She called her father. Mr. Meadows, with strange sagacity, unhesitatingly appealed to him with the air of one who is relieved to find himself at last dealing with a responsible man. This did the work with Beran. He pooh-poohed Helen's doubts and misgivings, and assured her loftily that it was all right and that she was merely alarming herself needlessly over something she did not understand. He unhesitatingly signed the mortgage that Mr. Meadows departed. There seemed nothing left for Helen but to follow suit, and she did so, though with a great deal of misgiving.

The notes were delivered with the check, and Helen felt a great sinking of the heart as she examined the stub on which the depleted balance showed. Mr. Meadows departed with many insincere and flattering remarks which she did not hear. She was trying to remember something that she had heard a long time ago from her father. Finally she went to a directory and turned the pages.

"I don't think we were wise in following Mr. Forbes's advice," she said to her father. "I am getting more and more sure of that fact every moment. Get on your coat and hat and come with me, father."

"Where are you going?" asked Beran.

"To Suite 25, Hualapai Block," said Helen.

There was a peremptory note in her voice that Beran knew better than to question, and he obeyed her quite meekly. They hurried to the Hualapai Block.

"Now," said Helen, "look up here at this building and tell me if it isn't the same one that the young lawyer was in when

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Nephi Lane took you to him to have the deed to our ranch made out?"

"Yes," said Beran.

Helen marched into the building and started to climb the stairs, with her puzzled father behind her. At Suite 25 she hesitated a moment, and then boldly opened the door and walked in. A youth of about twenty-three sat at a desk with his feet upon the edge, reading a law book.

"Is Mr. Forbes in?" asked Helen.

"Down in Phœnix attending the Legislature," said the young man. "Mr. Meadows will be in shortly."

"I wished to see Mr. Forbes on private business," said Helen, and backed out. On the stairs she turned to her father.

"Was that the man who drew up the deed?" she asked.

Mr. Beran, with strange doubts and terrors surging in his mind, nodded assent. But there seemed nothing to do and Helen, when she had turned the matter over in her mind, decided to let it rest until some way out should suggest itself to her. Bill wrote in for supplies, and she was growing quite capable of looking after that end of the business. At first she was afraid to ask for credit, but soon found out that it was expected and from her rapidly growing knowledge was able to get as good terms as any one.

She was fairly busy in these days, and several weeks went by before the matters she had been so disturbed about were brought again to her attention. This was when Bill McGhie came to town, after getting his flocks settled to his satisfaction on the desert Winter range.

Bill had changed greatly since he had become the Superintendent and General Manager of the company. He was forceful and self-confident now and had a dogged determination that overlaid his pessimism completely. He no more looked on the dark side of things and gave way to despair. On the contrary, whenever things went wrong Bill evinced a strong desire to fight against fate. He was gloomy when he came into the office, but his gloom was submerged in wrath.

"You-all didn't turn over that money and them notes to them crooks?" he demanded of Helen.

"We had to," explained Helen. "What was the matter, Bill?"

"I couldn't git away, nohow, without leavin' them sheep to starve," explained Bill. "But I thought that writin' on the receipt would hold you back till I could git here. Them sheep we paid four dollars apiece fer is old, broken-mouth ewes that ain't worth a dollar two bits in K. C. We got stung, that's whatever, an' I want to git my paws on the feller that done it. That Lane had better step high an' wide around me hereafter."

"I expected as much," said Helen quietly. "But we should be able to get a fair yield of lambs this year and we can perhaps build up the flock before they become perfectly worthless. We must do the best we can, Bill, and until we can get some more competent advice we had better not discuss the affair outside."

"I ain't a-goin' to discuss it none," said Bill, "but I reckon I can beat the head offn that Lane if I run into him."

"I have no objection," said Helen.

Later Forbes came in, and on his face there was a change which made his eyes seem closer together than ever. This was a few days after Bill had returned. Helen was alone in her office when the man opened the door and entered.

"So you are back from Phœnix?" she said sweetly, though her eyes were bright with rage. "What luck did you have? I suppose you are our next Delegate to Congress?"

FORBES looked at her as if at a loss to know how much she knew of his affairs. He was a little bit seedy, as Helen noticed, and looked as if he might have been drinking lately.

"Well, how's the sheep business getting along?" he asked. "I guess you have heard the news about me?"

"I am sorry to say I have not," said Helen dryly. "I have been very busy, you know."

"So I hear," grinned Forbes impudently. "Quite the business woman! Well, I've been around with your father a bit, and as he and I have had a few business deals, as you might say, I thought you had heard about me. But maybe he didn't like to talk about them. So you don't know what happened down in Phœnix last week?"

"I can't say that I do," said Helen. "Did you take advantage of some helpless and ignorant women and doddering men down there?"

Forbes started sharply. "What are you talking about?" he demanded.

"Your partner is Mr. Meadows?"

"Yes. What has the fool been doing?"

"And you have a young man in your office who is quite expert in drawing up deeds?"

Forbes looked at her with uncertain regard. It was certain that this new and more confident girl had been finding out things, and he was anxious to know how dangerous her knowledge might be.

"Have you been listening to Clay Hyatt's lies?" he snarled.

"I don't think he tells lies, Mr. Forbes," she said quietly. "At least, he has not told me any. I could find out about your trickery for myself. I am quite well aware that you have systematically worked in the interest of the Lanes for some time."

"Well, what of that?" he asked. "It's a funny theory that a man should not work for his clients."

"I don't object to your working for them," she replied. "But I do that you should offer us advice with the object of tricking us to his advantage. Mr. Hyatt warned me against you and I am sorry his warning came too late."

"So it was Hyatt," said Forbes. "Now, I suppose you didn't know that he was on my trail down at Phœnix, did you? I reckon you didn't have anything to do with the fact that every influence in this Territory that's worth a cuss was brought to bear to defeat me down there, did you? Oh, no! *You* don't know a thing about it! Blamed if I don't believe Dave Lane was right, and I suspect you know the fellow a sight better than a decent woman should. Well, well! Miss Innocence putting it over *me!* It's a good joke on me."

The innuendo made Helen feel sick and nauseated.

"I think you had better go!" she exclaimed, wondering at her cold repression.

"Oh, no!" said Forbes. "Not just yet. You see, your esteemed parent has been down here for some time and he has quite an idea of his dignity as an officer in your company. In fact he is quite the magnate and likes to show all the boys a good time. That costs money, you know, and Mr. Beran hasn't yet begun to draw his dividends. So he had recourse to me, and I was obliging enough to lend him quite a bit. I took his stock as security, you know, and, unless he is prepared to redeem it, I think I will have to call in the loan. I think I'll be around and butt into a stock-holders' meetng."

"I wish you would go," said Helen wearily. Forbes laughed and went out.

There were bars where men gathered before they went home to their wives and Forbes was known to frequent these at times. A word dropped here and there in a small town soon finds its way to remote sections, and when it concerns a girl whose beauty has attracted as much attention and jealousy as had Helen's there is no limit to the speed with which it travels.

Men were soon noticed to turn on the street and stare impudently at her or grin. Women turned their noses in the air and marched past her without seeing her. A story was out which would take a lot of denying before it died.

A woman at the house where she stayed got up from the table when Helen appeared and flounced from the room, saying that she was particular with whom she associated. A day or two later the cruel truth was borne to her in a way that there was no misreading. The landlady asked her to go, expressing regret and disbelief, but saying that naturally she was compelled to protect herself and her trade. The world had come to an end for the girl, so far as Prescott was a world.

CHAPTER XXII

MORONI BUYS SOME STOCK

MR. BERAN was perfectly chastened when his daughter got through with him, but that did not alter the fact that his indiscretion had once more put them in a position of danger. If Forbes or Lane were to get possession of his stock, there would be nothing to prevent their throwing the company into the hands of a receiver and winding it up. Bill was furious and wanted to go forth and start a war with any of the Lanes or with Forbes, but Helen dissuaded him from this action.

Yet they were in a place where advice was essential to an escape, and there seemed to be no one to whom they could apply except a lawyer. There was only one lawyer that they knew and he was the man who had originally aided them to draw up the articles of incorporation. He was Baker's attorney and Helen was sure that as soon

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as he found out how the affairs of the company had been mismanaged he would take steps to oust them from control, but as she did not believe that they were qualified to manage the company, she rather thought that this would be the best way out of it.

They would go back to their ranch, if it still remained to them, and she would take up again the round of her household duties. It had been pleasant, this hard and earnest work she had groped through these last weeks, but she would be glad to see the great Black Mesa again and watch the Ranger's still figure as he trotted by the house with his hands crossed on his saddlehorn and his eyes bent on the road in front of him.

Meantime she sought the office of the lawyer. His name was Egerton, as she remembered, and she found the place without any difficulty.

Formality of clerks and stenographers was lacking in the office of an attorney in a small Arizona town, and Helen was prepared to meet Mr. Egerton in his outer room. But there was no one there and she supposed that he was engaged in consultation with a client in the smaller, inside office, to which the door was closed. So she sat down to wait with meek patience, and thought bitterly of the state to which she had come.

Almost she found it in her heart to hate the irresponsible father who had laid this burden upon her. They had had enough, with her salary, to live in Prescott with a reasonable amount of comfort, but Beran had wished to pose as a magnate and one of the favored of Fortune. She had been too busy to watch him and he had spent his time in the hotel lobbies and bars, "living up to his position," as he had explained it to her. She had been quite ignorant that he had borrowed money from Forbes and had hypothecated his stock to do so.

But he was not responsible, she reflected, and she herself had been at fault as much as he. If she had only taken this thing seriously from the beginning and devoted herself to learning the business, all might have gone well, and she certainly would not have fallen into every trap that had been laid for her.

The door was thin, and the partition between the rooms was but a thickness of plank. The voices that came through it were quite audible if one chose to listen intently, and there was a note in one of them that impelled her to attention which was almost subconscious. She did not mean to eavesdrop, but her idle thoughts gradually focused on that smooth voice that crept through the wall.

"The Transcontinental people put up a little fight for a while, but there will soon be another election of directors and the estate is too big a factor to be lightly disregarded. Uncle Ben finally agreed to throw Forbes and then the T. C. people were easily brought around to the same side. That took away all but the stockmen and the Mormons, and, of course, with Baker & Puddifoot working actively against him and the railroads bringing pressure to bear, the Association saw light and flopped.

"It wasn't such a hard matter to get the Prophet to direct Lane and his cohorts to keep their hands off. There is already some scandal regarding Dave's and Nephi's conduct in the quorum of Apostles. I ask you, Egerton, what chance did the fool have? We went over him like a stampede."

Some one chuckled.

"Evidently you rode over him rough," the reply came. "But what made you hold off so long if you had it in for him? After that performance of his on Pioneer Day and since, I've often wondered why you didn't nail his hide to the door long ago instead of going off and sulking in the hills."

"I don't think that affair was his fault," said the Ranger, a little sullenly. "Of course, the coward spread the worst interpretation of it around, but it was quite bad enough anyway. And I'll sulk in the hills, as you call it, until I get back some of my self-respect, and all the talk you and the rest can make won't have any effect."

Helen felt that it was time that she made her presence felt, and she went up to the door and knocked. The door was flung open at once and she was face to face with Hyatt.

"What favors the gods bestow on poor mortals!" he said. "The mousehound will never cease to reproach me for not bringing him."

"I didn't mean to listen to what you were saying," said Helen, forgetting for the moment all her troubles. "But I gathered enough from it to explain Mr. Forbes's recent heat, and I am glad."

She spoke a little viciously, recalling his

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insinuations and insults. But she could not remain indignant at such trivial matters as long as the Ranger was looking down into her eyes with glances that spoke a world of things that he could not utter.

Egerton held the door open for her. She entered and took her seat by the lawyer's table. The two men followed her in and also sat down. Helen swept the Ranger with her glance, wondering at the difference that there seemed to be in him.

It was the same man, but in that environment and under a new excitement he seemed to have changed inexplicably. There was no longer the moody look in his eye, nor did there appear the sardonic levity that had once or twice offended her. Now he sat, no longer in blue jersey and flapping chaps, but clad in serge and white collar like any one of the well-to-do. But in his face, his eyes and the set of his mouth there was a new expression of determination and hope and a something that gave her a thrill to read therein.

"Now," said the Ranger, "won't you tell us what has brought the good luck of your presence to us?"

"I'm ashamed to," sighed Helen. "It is what I warned you against when you advised Mr. Baker to invest his money in this affair. I am afraid he will never see it again."

The Ranger grinned.

"It's quite possible that he might lose it if it wasn't for the character of the people behind it," he said. "But I am sure that neither you nor Bill nor your father would defraud him. And if you don't, I don't see how he *can* lose."

"But," said Helen, "we *have* defrauded him, though we did not intend to. Mr. Forbes has control of all father's stock."

IF SHE had thought this would be a bomb in the midst of their complacency she was disappointed. The Ranger looked at her and smiled, while Egerton laughed outright.

"I told you they would fall for it," said the Ranger to Egerton.

"I wouldn't believe that they were such fools," said Egerton. "Didn't the ass look up the articles of incorporation at all? And he calls himself a lawyer!"

"It was Beran's talk that did it," replied the Ranger. "He didn't have any idea what the articles contained and talked so large and loosely that Lane, who has only the low cunning of half insanity, took it for granted that the land was alienable. Forbes never knew any law and his practise is a bluff. He took Lane's word for it, and neither of them has any idea yet that they are stung. And I suppose they thought that we would at once take out the patents, though any inquiry of the Land Office would show that we hadn't yet done so. Even Bill has not yet applied for patent."

Helen could make neither head nor tail of all this, but she was immensely relieved to see that her news did not depress her friends.

"Isn't it all very serious?" she asked. "Can't they apply for a receiver and close up the company now that they have that stock?"

"Yes, they can," said Egerton, "but I don't think they want to do that. I'd make a guess that, if what we suspect is true, they would much rather buy you out if they can get complete control cheaply enough. And of course, if they make any reasonable offer, it would be the part of wisdom to take it up."

"I wouldn't insist on a reasonable offer, at that," grinned the Ranger. "I'd pretty near give them the rest of the stock if I owned it.

"Don't you worry any, Miss Helen," he added. "You aren't going to lose a thing and these foxes are going to get caught in a trap of their own setting. If they had even ordinary ability they wouldn't get themselves into such a mess; but they haven't sense enough to pound sand in a rat hole. Forbes is trying to get even and he is going to get bit instead."

"But," said Helen helplessly, "I don't understand!"

"And we are not going to explain to you yet," he answered. "Probably your conscience would hurt you if you knew the facts and you might decline to take part in spoiling the Egyptians. But we'll send for Baker and he'll advise you what is to be done. Will you do just what he tells you, and take my word for it that you will not suffer any loss by doing it, no matter how strange it may seem?"

Helen looked trustfully at him and he smiled back at her.

"Yes," she agreed, "if you wish me to."

"I do," said the Ranger.

After that Helen was prepared blindly to

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present the whole company to Forbes if he asked her for it.

"Well then," said the Ranger, "I will walk with you as far as your house and explain just what you are to do, if you will permit me."

Helen was quite prepared to permit him and they went out. On that walk he told her, much to her wonder and mystification, just what she was to do, though it seemed to her that by doing it she would be reducing herself to beggary. Still, if *he* assured her it was all right she would do it, and use whatever histrionic ability she had in the effort to carry off the affair successfully.

A Mexican boy passed them on the street and looked back at the Ranger. A moment later, looking to see that he was a sufficient distance away, he called a shrill word.

"*Carnicerol*" he shrieked, and fled.

The Ranger reared as if shot and a contortion of rage and pain shot across his face. Helen was frightened. "Are you ill?" she asked.

"Yes," said the Ranger sharply. "Sick at heart! I had forgotten."

At her door he left her, though she asked him in with her eyes.

Then came that cruel word from the landlady and the seeking of a place where she could hide from all who could recognize her. Yet she could not hide, for Forbes and Lane found her, and when their names were sent up to her it was with a sort of desperate defiance that she determined to see them.

"Well?" she demanded sharply. She would have no hypocritical pity from these snakes.

"Hem!" said Moroni. "The ways of the Lord is past understandin'. We-all know you are in financial straits, Miss Beran, and that this here sheep business of yours is jest about to bust. We got Bill McGhie's stock an' your pa's an' today we persuaded this man Baker that there wasn't no money in this thing fer him an' he parted with his holdin's for five thousand dollars. We come to see if you'll listen to reason an' sell out because we don't want to *force* you out, none!"

Helen wearily went through the farce and chaffered complainingly as the Ranger had coached her, but her interest was listless.

She went to Egerton's office to ask him to cash the check for one thousand dollars, which Lane gave to her for her interest. Here she got another surprise. Egerton spoke of having heard some gossip and cheered her by his denunciation of it. He had his wife come to the office, and Mrs. Egerton took Helen to her heart and home. Egerton pooh-poohed the idea of her going away, and when she spoke of having lost the ranch he laughed.

"The ranch never belonged to that company and never could," he asserted. "You and your father go back there and live whenever you get ready. Bill is in charge up there, and when these fools try to take possession his instructions are to treat them as trespassers and put them off by force if necessary. Those people bought from you and Bill and Baker nothing but a lot of poor sheep and a mortgage.

"Possibly you may have to pay a little for the improvements made on your ranches, but Baker will advance that. He will also furnish you all the sheep you want, or, if you don't want any, he will buy your land, as soon as you have the patent on it, at a price that will surprise you. You go out with my wife and don't be afraid of the gossip of these cheap people, but stick around here until we see whether they are fools enough to institute proceedings in court."

"But," said Helen, "we were to turn the land over to the company!"

"You were not," said Egerton, "because you could not. You merely leased the sheep you were to graze on that land from the company and agreed to pay them a rental for them. The lease was terminable at will and all the property that the company owned was the flock. The company was to make its profits from the rent you paid them for the sheep. Do you begin to see?"

"Then what," asked Helen, "did Mr. Lane buy?"

"A lemon," said Egerton. "A large and juicy lemon!"

Two weeks later Helen and her father were served with a summons to appear and answer to the complaint of Moroni Lane in the United States District Court, in Equity, to show cause why a decree should not issue commanding them to vacate certain lands and turn over the improvements thereon to the complainant. This frightened her, but when she showed it to Egerton he laughed and said that he would attend to it.

TO BE CONCLUDED

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THE DAWN OF MY TOMORROW

By George W. Sutton Jr.

I AM A BROKEN man, they say. Let them say it. They know nothing of the future, which, like a glimpse of a flowered valley from a hilltop, has just opened out before me. I live alone in a little thatch hut with mud walls, on the Kilindini Road, half way between Mombasa and the Deep Water, the mouthway of East Africa. To the natives I am what they call *mzee*—an old man—but tonight I am young as a boy. The thatch of my roof leaks woodticks, jiggers and praying-mantises down into my curry bowl, and the earthen floor is a playground for lizards and flies, a haven for flying ants that come in clouds and drop their wings all over my rope and webbing bed.

I am physically worn out and gone. The Black Water fever is in my blood, recurring year after year, and some day it may kill me. Well, then I shall die. *Inshallah!* But before then, though the zest of youth seems dimmed, there is a meed of happiness in store for me. For, but a few hours past, a Nubian carrier brought me a cablegram.

My left leg has a curious "drag" from seven years of tugging at an iron ball, and on my ankle is a blue-and-purple scar where the chain bit in.

Outside, in the little cassava garden which I call the "compound" is a baobab tree, underneath which I offer up devotions to my god, Brahm. Oh, yes, I am a Brahman, though I was born in Maine. I must be a Brahman or go crazy. There are many things about it I know are wrong, but I simply *must* believe in reincarnation. There *must* be another life somewhere later to compensate me for the cruel things I've endured in this terrible world.

I have lived, and I have loved, and I have suffered. I've had my revenge. Today my conscience is clear. Much good that does me! But joy awaits.

The pariah dogs and the beetles are my only friends. I fish most of the time. I never go into the crowded haunts of men except at night, when I sneak forth, with a white no-caste turban low down over my forehead, to buy tobacco, betel nut and quinin.

In the market places I speak to no one excepting the *fundis* I buy from. Them I address in pidgin-English, though I am cursedly familiar with Kaffir, Zulu, Kiswahili and even Gujarati. In this way I hear many strange opinions about myself. Bazaar women speak of me. I am demented, say they—an object of reverence. As the Swahili expresses it, "*Haizuru*"—I care not. And I don't wear the turban from choice.

As a boy I ran wild. It is hard for a mother to earn her living and watch eight children at the same time. I wanted to roam. I refused to study. Work (in a

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blacksmith shop) repelled me. I ran away to the next town and shipped on a trader bound for China. I was cabin boy, about as important as the ship's cat, and I hated the sea.

But I learned things. Oh my, I learned things! By the time I had knocked around the East for ten years I was wise and thought I knew about everything there was to know. I found out differently later. I was hard, too—hard as nails; but, for a wonder, I was pretty clean morally.

I fancied I knew every place and custom in the whole East. That also was an error. I had been in the dives of Vladivostok, smiled with the geishas of Hakodate, sipped *kava* on Lanai and dallied with the absinth-crazed Frenchmen of Tamatave. But the ways of the world I knew not. Nor do I know them today.

My grandfather, or possibly my great-great-great-grandfather, must have died with some unexpiated crime on his soul. Else why should the Fates have sent *me*, penniless, into the African Diamond Fields? Or rather, why should they have sent me and Diane Wyatt there together? Undisturbed I would have worked there a while, for work, such as it amounted to, was plentiful enough. Then I would have drifted on. But when she came the Fates displayed their venom.

Diane was a London society girl, the daughter of the Resident Director of the diamond company. The field where I was lay north of Kimberley. I can't tell just how far north, but far enough to be broiling hot all the time.

Let me tell you now that this diamond company was—and still is—the most beautifully complete monopoly in the world. It controlled the whole situation — Judges, storekeepers, villages and tribes. And this same company held absolute sway in the diamond markets of the white man's country in London, Paris, New York. I was to feel its power.

Diane was more than a society girl. She was a woman. She had tired of dancing men and cigarette-smoking girls. Life, she thought, should hold many other things. Aye, it does! When she first came to South Africa I was a "watcher" in the sorting-pen; a kind of overseer. My business was to keep an eye on the blacks as they pawed over the baked-out "blue" so they would not get away with any stones.

At that time the country was full of illicit diamond buyers and the black men would take long chances. Many times I have ripped open a jagged cut on a black body and extracted a five-carat "blue boy" hidden in the gory pocket. They had other methods and we other remedies that I can not tell about.

It was mean work. The punishment was so inhuman that, after she came, I applied for new work—and got it—in the office. But why? Oh, ye gods, why? Why should I, a drifter, little better than a beach-comber, suddenly assume a new tenderness of heart, a new desire to be respectable, new and vaulting ambition?

As the answer comes winging to me over the years I am overcome with awe at my temerity, my conceit, in raising my eyes to such heights. How much better would it have been had this girl, this wonderful Diane, with the pale, serious face in an aureole of untamed yellow curls, simply ignored my intrusive presence on earth! But there's the trouble. God bless her, she didn't!

MAYBE it was my towering bulk that attracted her; maybe my apparent seriousness. It may have been pity. Who knows about a woman? The fact remains that she treated me as no other of her sex ever did before or since. Remember, I had been drifting around the world since I was twelve years old, mostly in the company of sailors, and the women I'd met weren't—well, weren't her kind.

So when she smiled at me as she did with no other motive that I could see than plain kindliness, my brain was in stays. Then I thought I saw a light ahead and I worked. Good Lord, how I worked! And how I saved! One thing I did was to buy some pipe-clay for my canvas shoes and sun helmet.

I was wise enough—or lucky enough—to keep my Idea a secret for a long time; that is, a secret from everybody but Diane. I think she knew or suspected from the beginning, for when she would look at me there was that in her eyes which sent me back to the office with an insatiable desire to do all the work in the world.

Don't let this lead you to believe that Diane and I were openly intimate. Not so—at least not then. Her father would have shipped her off to London for good on the next steamer, and I knew it. So I just

plugged. It was bad enough to have her up there for the "season" every year. We didn't write. It was too risky in a place where every one knew your business.

The times when she was gone I lived in an agony of fear lest some society whippersnapper would persuade her to marry him. But no one did; and by the time she had made four semi-annual trips I was assistant manager of the workings. I knew diamonds. Better than all, I knew that under my skull there was a brain that was slowly leading me on to my goal.

I had seen three men ahead of me go to the "Pen" down in the swamp, one by one, for answering the siren call of gold as uttered by the clever illicit diamond buyers. Company detectives were everywhere. So were the buyers, and you couldn't tell who was buyer and who detective.

Those fellows were fools, thought I. True, the evidence was not very strong, but the stones were found on them and that satisfied the company. Think of it, seven years' penal servitude—in a swamp! I got their jobs in succession and never wavered. No one could think of Diane and be dishonest.

Suddenly things took a bad turn. Diane was expected home, or rather back from her fifth trip. A day or so before she arrived her father sent a "boy" to tell me he wanted to see me. As I stood before him I saw that he knew, and I hated him for it.

"Steele," said he, looking at me with glittering eyes and stroking his straggly beard, "Diane is coming back. This may be her last time here. It all depends on you. I've watched you for five years now and I have this to say: If you hold any hopes concerning my daughter, you're a fool. If you persist, you're an idiot. This is a strong company. That's all."

"Yes, sir," said I, and I left the house quickly so as not to kill him.

Evidently he had known my state of mind all the time. But do you think his warning stopped me? Well, guess. If there is any one thing that love thrives upon more than another, it is opposition; and when Diane, my Diane, returned to me I simply could not conceal my feelings from the rest of the camp. Of all that homely crowd it was my sole countryman, Sam Gibson, that told me what I was running into. And even that could not change me, but it made me think of the three poor fellows who had been ahead of me. There are some things a man can not help.

So I told Diane I loved her. And she agreed that I might do many worse things. Then I showed her my savings; and, from the horizon, the Star of Hope shed its pure, soft light over our lives.

This was before l'Hommedieu appeared with his self-satisfied smirk, his little, shifty, near-together pig eyes, his sharp nose and his waxed mustache. A fine piece of work was l'Hommedieu. If ever a man looked the thief, he did, and yet I was the only person in the camp that seemed to think so.

Even Diane took him at face value because he was of "her world." She had known him in London. Maybe I was prejudiced. I had full right to be. L'Hommedieu had fallen in love with Diane's father's money and meant to possess it by marrying Diane. At least, that's what I figured, and I knew I was right. So I watched him as one would watch a cobra.

Oh, he was clever! It took him but a twinkling to discover how things stood between Diane and me. Then I knew I had an enemy. And I watched. He made no progress with Diane.

DESPITE all his cleverness I caught this tricky l'Hommedieu. Yet I did not catch him in anything I could prove. It happened in this way:

I had unearthed the fact that he would disappear for an hour or so every evening after dinner. One night I followed him. It was in the wet season, and the rain, which had let up around five o'clock, had started again and was coming down in smoking torrents.

I was standing under a poncho in the lee of Diane's house, where she lived with her father. I always did that in the evening, for, when she could, Diane would slip out to meet me for a few minutes by the old jack-fruit tree. On this night the rain was pounding on the sheet-iron roof, and I remember wondering if it would keep her awake.

Suddenly I forgot all about her. A shadow was moving through the pitchy blackness near the houses across the street, if you could call it a street. Now, when an honest man walks through the mud in a rainstorm he makes a noise. This was African mud, ankle deep, yet the figure emitted

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not a sound. I decided to see what was up, for I instinctively knew who the person was.

I waited a while, then set out. It was impossible to follow the water-filled footprints, and I had to go slowly for fear of overtaking the man ahead. The road led over a hill, outside the camp, ending at a lake three miles away. It was rank, forbidding country, given over to reptiles, parrots and lemurs, and was uninhabitable by even the natives. The only edifice between the camp and the lake was a shed in the cattle *kraal*, a quarter of a mile from the settlement. This, I figured, was the destination of the crafty little Frenchman. There could be no other.

I was unarmed, and consequently I had no wish to meet him on the road. It would be too easy for him to dispose of me, his obstacle, and he would never be suspected. So at the top of the hill I left the road and plowed through the swampy *shamba*.

I don't know how I ever reached the *kraal*. The night was black as ebony and a thick, soupy miasma, rising from the low marsh, seemed to press in on me with smothering closeness. There was great likelihood that I would step on a snake or a *kenge*, to say nothing of the almost certain chance of catching fever.

In spite of the poncho I was soaked to the skin when I finally arrived at the *kraal*. My double felt hat had leaked and warm rivulets of mixed rain and perspiration were running down my back. I felt by instinct that the shed was near, but until I almost ran my face into it I did not realize how near. Then I needed caution.

To crawl on your stomach in the slop of an African rain is no pleasant experience. I dared not do otherwise. Like a lizard, with ears wide open and senses alive, I wormed around the shed until a sound, the sound of human voices, stopped me short. The mud walls of the building were full of chinks, I knew, yet no light appeared. But I could hear the hum of conversation above the noise of the storm and I screwed my ear against the wall to listen.

The things I heard took my breath away. What chances he was taking! And how clever he must have been! I could hear his high-pitched, squeaky voice, with its polished French accent, speaking in terms of authority.

"You are bunglers," he was saying. "*Nom d'un nom d'un nom!* You are worse; you are apes. *Canaille!* Listen—*écoutez!* There are one hundred stones in the keeping of Number One and you delay. You wish the others to get them, may be? You are to—— Ah!"

A piece of baked mud, loosened by the pressure of my face against it, had fallen and his quick ear had caught the sound. I melted into the fog.

But swift as I tried to be, it was slow work. My sense of direction was upset and before long I realized that I was lost. I floundered around for many minutes, slipping knee-deep into slimy, oozy pools in which unseen things squirmed and splashed, and stumbling against stones and hassocks.

At last I came to the road. It was more like a brook; but it was a landmark and I hailed it with joy. The wind soughed through the mango trees; the warm raindrops spattered with stinging persistency. Which way lay the camp? By luck, I guessed right.

I had lost much time and my heart was pumping with excitement.

But, passing Diane's house, I felt the oppressive sense of another presence in the inky, thick night through which no light showed. I stopped, shivering, against my will. From the somber shadow of one of the bungalows came a black, muffled form, floating toward me, it seemed, with no sound. I crouched to meet it, gorilla-like, and was caught in the act.

For a second I was blinded. Night had turned to day, without warning, and my eyes could not stand the sudden transition. Then as swiftly came the darkness again, and some one chuckled.

"Monsieur is afraid, maybe?" said a smooth, cool voice mockingly. "The electric flash disconcerts one, *n'est-ce pas?*"

"Oh, it's you, is it?" said I, calmer now that the eerie form had become human, if one may say that a thing like l'Hommedieu could become human.

"Of a truth," he said, and paused. "Monsieur seeks exercise in the dampness?"

I was growing reckless.

"No," said I. "I wanted to look after my horse, in the cattle *kraal*."

What a fool I was to say that! But then his electric flashlight must have told him the truth anyway. For heavy-laden seconds he did not speak. Then:

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"The night air is most bad for small boys. *Bon soir, monsieur.*"

And he disappeared into the gloom.

In physical combat I could have broken this nasty little Frenchman over my knee. But he would not fight that way. Yet I knew he would fight me, and I was afraid. I admit it; I feared this tiny man as one would fear a scorpion in one's bed, an elephantiasis spider in one's drinking-water, or a tsetse fly anywhere. I call Vishnu and the great Indra to witness how well founded was my fear!

IT WAS so easy; so simple. I burn with shame when I think of it. I wanted to tell Diane's father what I knew. I decided not to. His anger against me had grown. He had asked me the impossible. I could not unlove his daughter.

And besides, of what use are accusations without proof? The only way to prove anything would have been to catch l'Hommedieu with the diamonds in his possession, an utterly improbable thing, considering his cleverness.

But, thank Heaven, I mentioned my suspicions to one of the company detectives whom I knew slightly.

Ah, with what completeness did l'Hommedieu remove me from his path! My career, my hope, my very soul snatched in a moment! And it was so easy. Yet he must have had strong influence with some one high in the company.

It was night. I was at the club. The billiard room was crowded. I sauntered into the deserted library and turned over the actress-strewn pages of the London *Graphic*. Presently l'Hommedieu entered, humming nonchalantly.

No one else was about.

"Has monsieur a match?" he asked, turning on me a sugar-sweet smile.

Without a word I handed him my almost empty box of safety matches. Again he smiled. And well he might.

He turned from me as he lighted his dainty monogrammed cigarette.

"A thousand thanks, monsieur," he said, still smiling as he returned the box and strolled carelessly from the room.

I slipped the box into my pocket and continued to peruse the weekly. I was only angered. No sense of impending doom possessed me.

Half an hour later, as I was leaving the club, I was approached by two men who had but lately arrived in the settlement. The taller of the two spoke.

"We want you, young 'un," he said.

I did not comprehend.

"You'd better come along without a row," he continued. "You're going to join the rest of the blighters down in the bog."

My brain ceased to move.

"Search 'im, Bill," said the tall one.

Before I could move he had snapped a pair of shining handcuffs over my wrists and the other was going through my pockets. He seemed to know just where to look. He drew out the match box and opened it. And there, nestling in the corner, lay a dirty, gray, uncut diamond, of about two and a half carats.

In a flash I saw it all.

"There's—a—a mistake," I blurted.

"Yes, you made a bad 'un," said the tall detective.

Then I gave way. I screamed, I kicked, I cursed. But it availed naught; they were two to one, with free hands.

The trial was a farce, like those of the three poor fellows ahead of me—and Heaven knows how many before them. In vain I told everything. No one believed me. Yes, one did; but her belief had no weight with anybody but me. Oh, that a girl like Diane should have had such a father! He actually grinned as the words came out; seven years' penal servitude—in a swamp!

As I was led from the little courtroom I passed close to Diane. Tears were streaming down her face and she held her arms out to me.

"I believe in you, dear," she said, so every one in the room could hear, "and I'll wait for you."

IN THE midst of my living death I had one amusement. The Kavirondo servant of one of the beasts in charge of us gave me a native flute—one of the kind they use in the Interior, made of a human shin-bone, with five notes. It had a cheerful, silly tone, and when I didn't have one of my attacks of Black Water fever, I used to while away the evening respite from purgatory learning to play it. After two years I got quite proficient. A man whose heart is gone and whose mind is numb will sometimes get to place a lot of importance on small things.

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But when the big thing occurred I was ready for it. For two years I had burned for it; had gloated over my probable actions if it ever really did happen. And it all came to pass so differently from what I had imagined.

I was a strong man. I had been buffeted around the world since childhood and I had come through it with an iron physique. Yet the shriveling heat of this inhuman prison camp where we worked all day in our yellow suits, dragging each an iron ball from the left ankle; the sleeping on the bare ground in our filthy huts where the sweat dried only to break out afresh, breathing always the tainted, heavy air from the stagnant swamps where the mosquitos bred by billions—these things were more than even I could stand. The Black Water fever will be with me until my weary soul takes flight. And this in spite of the quinin that Diane smuggled in to me.

Judge, then, what chance stood a weak little man, raised in the soft places of civilization and nurtured on absinth and cigarettes! When they brought l'Hommedieu through the gates I picked up my iron ball in my arms and danced for pure joy. Oh, the bliss of it—to watch my revenge work itself out with no need of help from me! He had been caught at last, and all I had to do was to sit by and watch him go to pieces.

He lasted three years. And in those three years he collected much of the reward of his deeds. Graven on my brain is the memory of the night he died. I might have saved him, or at least postponed the end. All necessary to pull him through the crisis of the fever was a febrifuge, a whacking dose of quinin.

He might as well have appealed to the devil for water as ask any of the guards for quinin. I had some. For fear I might relent, I picked up my iron ball and went to the river, where I cast every grain I possessed into the murky water.

Then I returned to listen to his delirium, his French ravings. Finally I got out my shin-bone flute, and, sitting in his doorway, I tootled my gayest air as he went out to meet his Maker.

Am I a monster—a demon? You may judge. Smilingly and deliberately he had taken away from me more than life itself. Is it not the Holy Bible that says, "An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth"?

IT WAS easier after that. One day they told me I was free. I did not know the time was up; I did not care. There was nothing for me to live for. They gave me new clothes and a little, very little, money. I waited until the night. Then I went to the place where, years before, I had hidden my savings—the savings I was to be married on. Ha! Ha! I laugh.

They were still there intact. I took them and sneaked away; up the coast to Mombas, where I got me this hut and donned this white no-caste turban so men would not know I was a convicted illicit diamond buyer.

Diane was waiting. But I ran away from her. She could never find me. I loved her; I love her; yet it could not be. Just once I took off the turban and gazed into my fragment of mirror. It was enough. There on my forehead were letters, red and gruesome, burned in with a white-hot iron—the letters "I. D. B." No, it could not be!

HOW futile are the strongest assertions of the strongest man in comparison with the whimsicalities of a woman! I use the word "whimsicalities" for lack of a better.

It was one month ago in the late afternoon. I was fishing from my dugout in Kilindini Bay. A black, slim-beamed Messagerie steamer was bringing its sharp stem around in the direction of Home. I had made it a point, since burying myself alive in Mombas sixteen years ago, never to notice steamers. They made me think thoughts that were not good for me. But I knew the crowd: unspeakable Colonial tourists from Beira and Durban and Cape Town; Frenchmen, with long, unscissored beards and funny white helmets and cheeks touching the bones from the ravages of wasting fevers picked up in the pest-holes of Madagascar; officers of the King's African Rifles going Home on furlough; employees of the trading-companies, the banks, the Eastern Telegraph Company, and—yes—the diamond company.

But this steamer got in my way. She got too close. I resented it. The churn from her propellers slewed me around and nearly swamped my *mashua*. I stood up in the fishy bilge to curse the fool of a Captain who dared to trespass—and *looked straight up into the face of Diane Wyatt!*

She had changed. She was older. She was thinner. And even at that distance I

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discerned an expression in her startled face which told me plain as day that she was not happy. But she was still the wonderful Diane whose heart-strings had intertwined with mine, whose smile had brought me to my knees at her feet and whose image in my memory had kept me alive all these years.

The steamer was already crawling. What of that? I was old—but there was still something left in me. I could swim—to —— with sharks. Would they let the gangplank down?

But suddenly I remembered. No, it could not be. I was who I was. I sat down on the little bamboo cross seat and covered my face with my hands. But only for an instant. The sight of Diane was precious, above mortal things. I looked at her, feasting my tired eyes, and as I looked she did something that set my poor, wrecked brain reeling; something that annihilated the intervening years and brought the Past up close.

Slowly she raised her arms and held them out to me. *To me!* Ringing in my ears seemed to be those heaven-born words that she had uttered back in the little courtroom down below, "I believe in you, dear, and I'll wait for you."

But at last I was a man, though the world considered me something quite different. I could resist temptation. Yes, for her I could. I stood up in the canoe—clumsily, because my eyes were misty. I put my hand to my head and removed the white no-caste turban. They burned. I could feel them—those cruel, red letters of the felon mark. And Diane saw and understood.

When the steamer was no longer even a shivering spark on the horizon I turned the dugout about and paddled home through the tropical night. My every-day life—if such an existence could be termed life—was resumed, only there were new, tormenting thoughts. But Paradise was yet to open.

Three weeks passed. On the twenty-first day a postboy brought me a letter—from Diane—at Aden.

Oh, the joy of reading that letter! After all those weary, dreary seasons, what recompense! The words of her letter are sacred, but the idea I can tell about. She was still single; her father had died; things were different with her; and—and—oh, I love you, Diane, I love you—she wanted me. There was pure bliss in that knowledge, but—had she seen the mark?

I wrote her and told her of it; told her, for her dear sake, it could not be.

My answer was a cablegram—

Come.

I go.

The CAMP-FIRE

A MEETING PLACE for READERS, WRITERS & ADVENTURERS

AT THE last dinner of the New York Chapter of the Adventurers' Club I sat next to A. D. H. Smith. It was through Albert Sonnichsen that Smith got his experience fighting the Turks in Macedonia before the late bunch of Balkan wars began, and I added quite a little to the small stock of information about Sonnichsen that I had previously pumped from the modest Dane himself.

Passing over his experience as deck-boy on a Nicaraguan bark, three years before the mast, quartermaster on an Army transport, prisoner among Filipino insurgents, two hours as Governor of an entire Filipino province, five years in journalism and junta-ism in New York, and numerous other experiences, we come to the reason for his writing stories of Bulgaria like "Marginal Figures."

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BRIEFLY stated it is three years as press agent for the Macedonian Committee, one year of it continuously in the field with the fighting *chetas*, ending with his marriage to the daughter of Vladimir Debogory Mokrievitch, well known in Russia and one of that early group of Nihilists which finally killed the Czar, who escaped on the way to the Siberian mines and after many adventures became an engineer with the Bulgarian army. *Savrov* was suggested by the career of a man well known to Mr. Sonnichsen's wife and father-in-law—Vladimir Bourtseff, who created an international sensation by exposing, among other spies, Azeff, leader of the Socialist-Revolutionist party and at the same time agent of the Russian police.

EARL ENNIS knows "California's one dead spot"—the Mohave Desert:

Irrigation is ringing the knell of the old desert as we know it, for the shifting, wind-blown sand-holes are being replaced by canals of water from the high Sierras, and men are building homes where once the scoop-bellied coyote held hungry sovereignty.

Before the old order of things is gone, before the tanned, slow-spoken adventurers who have written their epics in this hidden pocket of the world have become but half-remembered history, I wish to tell in a simple way some of the things I have seen and more of the things I know about them, lest their bigness, their realness, and their closeness to the great heart of Mother Nature be forgotten in the recollection of their accomplishments. . . .

"By Primitive Code" is a story of men in the raw, of a wanton killer of men; yet . . . the characters I have used may be found on the edge of the great borax fields today—proud of their positive kinship to that drear waste of alkali. . . . It is these men I would have you remember, and not the story itself or the manner of its telling.

IN DECEMBER we published Captain Fritz Duquesne's account of his own life. Since then several letters have protested more or less violently that his charges against the British during the Boer War were unfounded. Some demanded that their letters be published, but not with their names attached. I replied that, as always, we stood ready to present both sides of a question and would give them space, but that since Captain Duquesne had made his statements openly and over his own name, it was only fair that they should do the same. No one of them has answered.

It is Camp-Fire custom generally to allow a man to withhold his name if he pleases, but in a case like this, where a discussion waxes somewhat bitter, I think most of you will agree that both sides should speak on an exactly equal footing.

WE HAVE occasionally been accused of too strong a leaning toward the English, while now we are criticized for exactly the opposite. Perhaps some day we shall convince even the small minority of our readers that this magazine plays no favorites in nationality, race, religion or anything else. We give our readers the best stories we can get and serve as the organ and clearing-house of the vast and scattered army of wanderers and restless spirits who have no other meeting-ground. That's all.

Before leaving the Duquesne matter let me remind his objectors of my introduction to his autobiography, stating that it consisted of rough and hastily written notes which he expected me to smooth into shape for publication. They seemed to me more interesting as they stood, so some of the ire must be turned from him to me.

CAPTAIN DUQUESNE, by the way, has sailed on his expedition across South America. I expect to get occasional word from him, but letters from the Amazon region are naturally not often feasible. It has been months since I've heard from Algot Lange or from the University of Pennsylvania expedition with which he was for a time connected.

HE WAS a star on our college nine when I went to school in Ohio, but it was only a year or so ago that he walked into the office and I found he was the same Hugh Fullerton who stands in the first rank of the country's baseball writers and whose "dope" I had been absorbing for years past.

We agreed that a series of baseball stories, in fiction form, but drawn from his own intimate acquaintance with the big-league players, would make particularly good reading and be something new in baseball tales if made very personal and dealing with the private side of the players' baseball lives—a side almost never seen by the public. For example, "Hit by Pitched Ball," in this issue.

THE Chicago Adventurers' Club, with seventy-odd members, has been incorporated under the laws of Illinois, is laying plans for a permanent club house, and in

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general is flourishing like the green bay tree and setting a fast pace for the other Chapters.

As stated before, though this magazine has no connection with the Club and no voice in its affairs, inquiries keep coming in, and to give the information asked for I have prepared a brief statement of the aims of the Club, how to join it, etc., which will be sent on request.

WHILE George W. Sutton, Jr., was in Zanzibar, in the ivory and clove trade, he picked up the story that lies back of the "The Dawn of My Tomorrow." H. D. Couzens, I need not tell you, knows schooners and the South Seas. William West was himself once a forest ranger. Talbot Mundy knows India at first hand. As does Louis Tracy England. Berton Braley has answered the call of the *Wanderlust*. Robert Johnson knows football and jokes. In other words, every single author in this issue knows what he's writing about.

CHAUNCEY THOMAS knows the West as it was. Those of you who also know the old days will be interested in this bit from a letter of his. All of you will, I think. He and I had been discussing various things personally and by letter. What follows is merely a piece torn from the middle of our talk, which accounts for his speaking at all about his own marksmanship. I happen to know that, before his eyesight weakened, he was one of the best shots in the country, but he is not given to advertising the fact.

As for getting a galloping horse at two hundred yards, that is an easy shot. I have often hit a tin can in the air twice before it fell to the ground—with a rifle, I mean. With a six shooter 'tis a harder job, but I remember with a smile of spoiling a cowpuncher's $8 new Stetson in this fashion some years ago, when he took me for a tenderfoot and sent it sailing into the air with an invitation for me to shoot. I did, and he got a new hat.

As for the Indians quitting, you will notice that nine fights out of ten end in the same way, from individuals on the street corner to armies. One side gets enough and quits, swearing how they are going to eat 'em alive next time. As Napoleon said, and he knew if any man ever did, "The material damage between victor and vanquished is usually about the same, but the moral effects are tremendous." In fact, the victor is often injured worse than the defeated. Lee was in nearly as good shape as was Meade, after Gettysburg; he retreated in good order, and Meade was too badly done up to follow him. A knockout seldom occurs in actual fighting, where each side can retreat whenever it wants to.

Eighteen Indians attacking three or four white men is one thing, but after they discovered there were six white men, and it cost them seven of their own number to discover that fact—leaving the sides six to eleven—they naturally pulled out, *licked*.

ALSO repeating rifles were used in the latter part of the Civil War, the Northern troops being armed with the Spencer carbines in 1865, I think. My father went to Colorado in 1866, and carried a Spencer and two Colts. The modern Winchester was put on the market in 1873, and the Henry rifle was in use long before that. All were repeaters, of course, but light and short-ranged "machine guns" have been used only of late years, and never against the Indians. They shoot ten times per second—a good shot can shoot a Winchester five times in a little less than two seconds, and do fairly accurate work. The old Sharps could be fired about one half as fast as the repeaters for accurate work between 100 and 400 yards, the gun being designed to kill buffalo at 400 yards. I carried one when a boy. When the heavy Winchesters came in 1886 I carried one of them—a 12-lb. 45.90—after bear, elk, deer, etc.

In most "stories of adventure" dated back into the days of the Old West it often amuses me to see how they have the weapons mixed up, much as if they had George Washington using a typewriter to write the telegram which decided the fate of the hero, and on which the story hinged.

THE really wonderful things that happened in the West—like men standing off 4000 Indians for ten days and killing about 1200 of them—will not be believed nowadays, while in its place we have some wild-eyed chap running a whole town to cover, etc., etc.—truly impossible things that never did and never could happen in the Old West, any more than in New York today.

He might clean out a bar room, but that happens every day right here in New York. And the settlement was not all bar room, nor was the popping of corks and pistols the only sound in the place. I'd like to have seen one of these Tiger Bills try to clean out a newspaper office out there in those days. One man tried it, and he lasted about five minutes. The rifle that drilled a hole in his brain I now have. This was the only such attempt from the founding of the paper—the *Rocky Mountain News*—from 1859 to the present day, and over such a period of years some drunk might take a notion to try the same thing in any newspaper, or even magazine office, here in New York today. A man can find trouble in a bar room anywhere, and there are more gunmen in New York City today than there ever were at any time in the whole West from the Big Muddy to the Coast.

CUT the bar room out of most of these wild-eyed tales, and what have you left? And 99 out of 100 of the exciting things in the West occurred miles from any bar room, and usually were enacted by men who did not drink a drop. I was born and raised there, and never took a drink of any kind, nor even smoked, till after I was twenty-two years old. When surveying down near the corner of Colorado, Arizona, Utah, and New Mexico some twenty-four years ago—when the Utes got to ghost-dancing and ran the party out of the country without time even to get their camp things—I remember that one day

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the boss hired an instrument man, and we needed help badly. But he told a dirty story at the table the first night, and had to hit the trail next morning. No guns, hats or coarse talk were ever allowed at any Western table I ever sat down to, for these were the men and women who made the West, not a few bar-room bums, usually "wanted" in New York or Chicago.

Yet in the very camp I speak of things sort of smoked up one night, and out of six hit, three were wrapped in blankets and put on the railroad grade, and the graders went on grading. They are there yet, I guess, with the wheels rolling over them several times every day. But it was neither booze nor bad men, just a common fight such as takes place here in New York every month or so.

THE real adventure was swinging men over the cliffs at the end of three hundred feet of inch-rope to get a "back-sight" for the railroad, and incidentally to drill a couple of holes that were the first of many thousands that finally cut and blew the roadway for the rails down the cañon. And a whisky-soaked bum does not dangle on a rope like a worm on a fish-line for $60 a month and his board, don't you know!

I have seen fine shooting and splendid riding and brave deeds, but they were done by clean, quiet men, not by the criminal-hero of the usual "Western adventure" story. We soon settled him with a barrel stave or a rope, but usually tamed him with sixty days on the chain gang, after which he took a job waiting on table.

IN "CAMP-FIRE" for February, concerning "Irish," W. Townend's story of the Boer War, we made poor Mr. Townend speak twice of General Butler when he meant and had written Buller. We didn't catch the mistake till the very last set of proofs. On these we made the correction, but in the last-minute rush the change was not made in the composing-room. We divide the error with them. Please write it down as another case of good intentions.

HAVE I ever printed in the "Camp-Fire" any praise for the magazine? I don't think so. In fact I carefully cut that part of it out of letters when I pass them on to you. So maybe you won't mind if I leave it in this one:

To be frank, for a long time as a constant reader and admirer of ADVENTURE, I had thought the Camp-Fire pages merely a new form of publicity to lend tone to the title of the magazine and help the sale, etc.

But as I have since become convinced that it is really devoted to the happenings of the large and heretofore unchampioned army of "The Wanderlust," I'll retrench, and my hat is off to you and ADVENTURE, for your good work will never be forgotten, and your help will always be remembered by those who follow the unbeaten paths.

AS FOR myself, while I am a born seeker of the Rainbow's End, and my very commonplace happenings might seem interesting to the stay-at-homes, to those who, as I, roam whenever the "call comes," it's all in a day's work.

I have prospected over most of the West—Colorado, Arizona, New Mexico, Nevada, Oregon, Washington and California, chased the placer in the Yukon and on the beach at Nome, but my vocations as a whole have been numerous. I've taught syncopation to the "400" of Los Angeles and played piano in a dance hall in Dawson, Y. T. I've lost my burros and nigh cashed in from lack of water on the Mohave, and cussed the rain from my runabout in Portland, Ore. I've run one of the largest cafés and grills in Goldfield, and I've swamped out a honky-tonk saloon for my dinner in New Orleans. I've mushed a dog-freight team at 45 below from Nome to Council, and I've pitched hay at 105 in the shade in Mazatlan on the west coast of Lower California with Japs and Greasers. I've led a forlorn hope into Northern Sonora looking for a mythological placer, but the Yaquis drove us out, leaving two of our bunch behind; I've ridden the rods and enjoyed the luxury of compartments, but, as I said before, it's all in a day's work. I'm 32 years of age, and have lived through it all.

I'M NOW in Butte, having started out from Medford, Ore., about three weeks ago *via* the side-door route, after having tried to settle down, but "no can do"—it's in the blood, and I simply have to go. At present I'm playing and singing in a moving-picture show, getting together a stake and waiting for something to turn up. How long I'll be here I don't know, but in closing wish to state if you know of any one who is outfitting who wants a man who can stand the gaff, and will stick till the last dog is hung, to whom a 30-30 or a 45 seem natural at all times, why a line to me will bring an immediate response.

Hoping the good work goes on, and that the Camp-Fire never lacks fuel, I'll ring off.—No. C 147.

ATTENTION, deep-sea sailors of the old school! Here we add the mystery of the *Marie-Celeste* to the other mysteries we of the Camp-Fire are gradually solving among us. (We've now got the answer as to the fate of Bully Hayes, and are still working on General Sir Hector MacDonald, the argument on the battle of Tia Juana, Lawrence O'Rourke the Irish Buddhist, and the storming of Dargai.)

Permit me as an old reader of ADVENTURE and member of the Camp-Fire to express myself concerning a matter which has been a topic of conversation among seafarers for the last 41 years. I mean the mystery of the *Marie-Celeste*. Appeared in the December, 1913, issue of an English magazine an article which is supposed to clear up this mystery once for all, but which, although acceptable to thousands of landsmen, will appear as nothing short of absurd to any old square-rig seaman.

I have followed the sea in deep-water ships since my thirteenth year, and never have I seen discipline so far relaxed that Captain, mates and crew went on a swimming-match on the high seas, and in

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shark-infested waters at that, yet here in the ——— we read of all hands, even the man at the wheel (unheard-of), leaving their posts to humor their crazy Captain by going over the side.

There's a sailor being sent to the cabin (Sanctum Sanctorum aboard of any deep-water ship) to get a watch, and returns with the ship's chronometer. In 1872 sailors knew a chronometer from a watch—yes, sirree! No turnpike sailors aboard of square-riggers in those days.

Then again the sole survivor, one Abel Fosdyk, drifts 300 miles on a platform, without sail or oars, and without a morsel of food or water, and lands on the northwest coast of Africa. Is this possible? It seems that the *Marie-Celeste* was picked up by the English brigantine *Dei Gratia* 300 miles east of Gibraltar, practically in the same location where she was three days before her crew abandoned her so mysteriously, yet this supposed survivor drifts 300 miles, living on air (?), to tell of it in a diary 41 years after!

Again, in the archives of the U. S. Department of State we find in Document 132: "Chronometer and ship's papers not to be found aboard of the *Celeste.*" Then what became of the ship's papers? Perhaps the Captain had them with him when he went swimming! Likely, is it?

Conan Doyle in the Boston *Herald*, 1885, told a yarn explaining the mystery of the *Celeste;* but only a yarn, well told. But now comes this tale in the —— presuming to clear up this mystery. I would like to hear from those who have gone down to the sea in ships, for in the Camp-Fire circle there are undoubtedly men of the old school who sailed both before and aft the mast and whose judgment is worth having.

I think it a good yarn to tell the marines, but—will a sailor believe it? Yours for Adventure, CAPTAIN F. E. VAN LEUE, Hornell, N. Y.

HERE, again, is the brief explanation of our identification-cards. They are offered free of charge to any of you. All we ask is that you comply carefully with the simple directions as they appear below in italics:

The cards bear this inscription, printed in English, French, Spanish German, Portuguese, Dutch, Italian, Arabic, Chinese, Russian, and Japanese:

"In case of death or serious emergency to bearer, address serial number of this card, care of ADVENTURE, New York, U. S. A., stating full particulars, and friends will be notified."

In our office, under each serial number, will be registered the name of bearer and of one friend, with permanent address of each. No name appears on the card. Letters will be forwarded to friend, unopened by us. The names and addresses will be treated as confidential by us. We assume no other obligations. Cards not for purposes of business identification. Later, arrangements may perhaps be made for money deposits to cover cable or telegraph notifications. Cards furnished free of charge, *provided stamped and addressed envelope accompanies application. Send no applications without the two names and two addresses in full.* We reserve the right to use our own discretion in all matters pertaining to these cards.

Later, for the cost of manufacture, we may furnish, instead of the above cards, a card or tag of aluminum, proof against heat, water and general wear and tear, for adventurers when actually in the jungle, desert, etc.

A moment's thought will show the value of this system of card-identification for any one, whether in civilization or out of it. Remember to furnish stamped and addressed envelope and to *give the two names and addresses in full when applying.*

ARTHUR SULLIVANT HOFFMAN

WANTED —MEN

NOTE.—We offer this corner of the Camp-Fire, free of charge, to our readers. Naturally we can not vouch for any of the letters, the writers thereof, or any of the claims set forth therein, beyond the fact that we receive and publish these letters in good faith. We reserve the privilege of not publishing any letters or parts of a letter. Any inquiry for men sent to this magazine will be considered as intended for publication, at our discretion, in this department, with all names and addresses given therein printed in full, unless such inquiry contains contrary instructions. In the latter case we reserve the right to substitute for real names any numbers or other names. We are ready to forward mail through this office, but assume no responsibility therefor. **N.B.—Items asking for money rather then men will not be published.**

WANT three men, companionable, fair shots, for expedition to Jolo, Sumatra, Borneo and Siam. Adventure and fair profit assured, with chance at big money. Prefer men under forty, but age not essential. Could use a young medico and photographer. Must have some money for expense account and outfit. Come prepared to stick with the bunch.—Address No. W 214.

ONE or two fellows between 18 and 20, who want adventure in S. America; no freaks, but real, red-blooded adventure seekers.—Address No. W 215.

WOULD like to hear from some one not over 23, to take hunting- and trapping-trip to Canada; not farther north than Lake Athabasca.—Address J. D. SHATTO, Hartford, O.

AMERICAN-BORN native, of the Jack London "abysmal brute" type, desires partner or partners of temperament permitting enjoyment of elemental existence, to take part in profit-sharing venture; also a mate strong in primitive instincts and elemental passions. Will answer accurately all the What, Where and When questions of any one who has concluded that home is too small a place for them, and would-be wanderers seeking adventures, if they are serious.—Address W 222.

WANT to get in touch with man, single, with no girl behind; a gentleman, not a tough, to go on a hunting- and prospecting-trip to Alaska, and able to pay own expenses. Not over thirty, and should be experienced in placer mining and able to tell dust from "fool's gold." Good trapper, and good shot with rifle and pistol, and when the trail gets hard and the "tomcod" low, able to stand hard mushing and do his so with the others. No boozer or kid, but a man who would make up a party of three who can do all of the above in an effort to strike it rich, and who would be willing to mush from Ft. McPherson to Hudson Bay, just for fun.—Address F. W. LEE, Care Shell Fish Commission, Tallahassee, Fla.

WOMAN miner, experienced prospector in gold, tin, copper and oil, geologist and qualified assayer, photographer (has been in all the chief mining-camps of the world), seeks another woman fond of adventure to join her in a prospecting-trip to South America and share in the results. References exchanged.—Address MINER, Care Pan-American States Ass'n, 32d St., New York.

UNENCUMBERED expert automobile mechanic to rebuild 7-passenger car for hunting- and fishing-trip along Gulf Coast of Tex., across State to Rockies and Pacific Coast, taking in San Francisco Exposition and returning through Ore., Wash. and Yellowstone Park.—Address J. M. TURNER, Chenango, Tex.

THE undersigned wants to get in touch with some fellow wanderer who possesses the following qualifications:

Age between 25 and 35 years. Single. About 6 feet tall

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and built in proportion. (No bruiser.) Some sort of an education; must use good grammar. Knows enough to keep his mouth shut. Interested in photography. If possible owns camera. Interested in music; preferably one who plays violin. Interested in natural history. If belongs to some lodge or fraternity, so much the better. One who is not subjected to coughs, colds, or other diseases. Ex-service men, or one understanding stenography, will be given the preference.

Applicants must be interested in outside work, should be willing to walk, ride or sail, or travel thousands of miles. Must not be a mollycoddle, and one who will grin when everything is not of the best. If the grub gives out, and we have to sleep on a beach in a tropical downpour for two nights, still keeps on grinning, that's the man I want. I don't want, and won't have, a booze fighter, a gambler, or one who is running after the women all the time. This class had better stay out of this game. I want a man who can hold his own in any company, and any man who can answer to the above qualifications, or the greater part of them, and will write me personally, enclosing if possible some sort of a photograph of himself, will have a chance to get a good position, not job, with a first-class concern, and the chance for a brilliant future.—Address No. W 216.

HAVE chart, drawn by a pirate captain of Revolutionary days, which shows location of gold and jewels worth possibly $1,000,000, buried by him on isle off Fort Caroline. Should any one have a machine or instrument (there is probably iron among the other things) or any other plan for finding this treasure, let him communicate and we will search together, dividing profits. Am 22, used to roughing it, consider self a gentleman, and am engaged in moving-picture acting and some other things.—Address No. W 203.

WANT man around 25 as partner, trapping; one who understands skinning and drying process, as I am green. Have cabin in mountains 50 miles from Los Angeles; also a horse and wagon.

Am 25, native of New York City, parentage German. 125 pounds stripped, 5 ft. 7 in., brown hair, eyes.

Would like a young fellow with a little money to chip in for grub and traps, but not absolutely necessary. Have your own gun, if possible. All I possess now is a .32 revolver. Want a good-natured fellow with a sense of humor.

All letters will be treated confidentially or if in the vicinity call on me any evening or on Sunday at 3406 Central Avenue.—Address ED. ECKHARDT, 3406 Central Ave., Los Angeles, Calif.

LOST TRAILS

NOTE—We offer this department of the "Camp-Fire" free of charge to those of our readers who wish to get in touch again with old friends or acquaintances from whom the years have separated them. For the benefit of the friend you seek, *give your own name if possible.* All inquiries along this line, unless containing contrary instructions, will be considered as intended for publication in full with inquirer's name, in this department, at our discretion. We reserve the right, in case inquirer refuses his name, to substitute any numbers or other names, to ejerct any item that seems to us unsuitable, and to use our discretion in all matters pertaining to this department. Give also your own full address. We will, however, forward mail through this office, assuming no responsibility therefor. We have arranged with the Montreal *Star* to give additional publication in their "Missing Relatives Column," weekly and daily editions, to any of our inquiries for persons last heard of in Canada.

WILL Z. MOOREHEAD, who hunted orchids with me in the jungles of Panama write. Last heard of near Tampico, Mex., on the "Tascadore."—Address TED DICKSON, JR., *Morning Journal*, Key West, Fla.

IVER C. KALE, sometimes known as Jesse Allen or Bob Fife. Miner. Last heard from at Rio Janeiro, Dec. 25, 1912, headed for interior on prospecting expedition; never heard from since.—Address SAM REED, Nogales, Ariz.

LEROY SMILEY and Clarence Embree, who left Canada for Society Islands, write.—Address SCOTTY GORDON, St. Maries, Idaho.

EDWARD J. SHEHAN, 27. Last seen in Chicago 3 years ago.—Address his aunt, NELLIE HOLLAND, 908 N. Hamlin Ave., Chicago, Ill.

ANY one knowing whereabouts of George and Tom Brooks will throw a ray of gladness on the heart of their father and aunt by sending information. Last seen or heard from, were in Gary, Ind., with their father.—Address MRS. LYDIA M. RICE, 769 S. Wall St., Columbus, O.

JOE L. McDONALD. Left home three years ago; last heard from in Yuma, Ariz., or Pueblo, Colo. News of importance at home.—Address K. J. McDONALD, Midland, Beaver Co., Pa.

CHARLES HAMILTON. With me in Mexico, 1911, in oil fields and on hunting-trip. Taken with typhoid at Tampico. Also C. P. Kelley, Yuma; J. W. S. Gallup, Gibson Mines, Los Angeles. Address No. W 218.

MY SON, Oscar Weiner, left home July 10, 1910, age 15. Brown hair, gray eyes, scars on each side of eyes. Write his heart-broken mother, MRS. S. WEINER, 739 Gates Avenue, Brooklyn, N. Y.

WANT to learn whereabouts of brother, Mike Hinds. When last heard of, was leaving San Francisco for Alaska, July, 1910. Formerly of Detroit, Mich.—Address FRANK S. HINDS, Box 253, Tucumcari, N. M.

ANY one knowing or bearing the surname of Urita, write. Matter of greatest importance.—Address L. T. 213. Canadian papers please copy.

Please notify us at once when you have found your man.

SISTER of Charles A. Crown, wants to learn his whereabouts. Last heard of at Mesa, Ariz. Was connected with Crown Mining Co. of "Thunder Mt." fame, in 1903.—Address MISS A. M. CROWN, 152 Vanderwoort St., No. Tonawanda, N. Y.

Please notify us at once when you have found your man.

CHARLES HENRY RAYMOND. Good piccolo player. Served in a Suffolk regiment in Afghan war. Has Brittany tattoo on arm.—Address his youngest son, JAMES RAYMOND, 3306 Monroe St., Toledo, O.

W. J. (BILL) STEWART. Was with him in southern Cal. Started to Alaska together. Last seen in Mogul, Nev.

Also would like to hear from "Slim," "Bill," and "Shorty" of the S. P. surveying-party in Verdi, Nev.—Address G. D. BARR, Box 12, Sheffield Sta., Kansas City, Mo.

CAPT. of Co. B at Tia Juana, Mex. Also Billy Gregg-Anderson, wireless operator, from Fanning Island. Last heard from at Honolulu, H. T., and Sydney, N. S. W. —Address No. L. T. 219.

B. W. (or BERT) CHADWICK, missing over 9 months. His wife and little daughter would greet him gladly and aid him if necessary. Address MRS. CLARA CHADWICK, General Delivery, Boisè, Idaho.

CAPT. R. J. SMITH, whom I met in Orient, Cuba; well known in New York, Havana, New Orleans, Galveston, San Francisco, Seattle, Central America, especially Gautemala.—Address L. T. 221.

F. V. GROVES, communicate. Send only present address.—Address S. M. ROSENTHAL, Care Floersheimer Co., 31 W. 27th St., New York.

JOHN HADDOCK (Sen.) write. Was in Dawson, Fall of 1899.—Address JAS. A. HILLYER, Keystone, Nev.

CHARLES NEALE, late of 20th Hussars, William Neale, late of 7th Hussars, Ernest Neale, London.—Address ED. NEALE, Musician, 114th Co., C. A. C., Ft. Totten, N. Y.

BOYS in 11th Infantry, 1899-1902, write; also Sergt Jas. Foley, Co. L, 11th Infantry.—Address GEORGE M. Shafer, Moravia, N. Y.

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OHN MONTGOMERY, age about 70, of Illinois. Had two children, boy and girl. Last heard from in Indiana.—Address Box 894, Beaumont, Tex.

WALTER M. JOHNSON. 1905-06 with me in Mexico. Saw him last in New York, he on his way to Cuba. Have heard, indirectly, some one saw him in Mexico City in 1908. Any one who has seen him since 1907, and could tell me his address at the time, write.—Address HAROLD DE POLO, 92 Morningside Ave., New York City.

Please notify us at once when you have found your man.

YOUNG Jack V. ("Robbie") Macneill of Mexico and Montreal. 5 ft. 6 or 7 in., brownish hair. Draws pictures.—Address No. L. T. 179.

JOHN AVA MACDONALD of Winnipeg, Minneapolis, Weyburn and Regina, Sask.—Address MRS. D. C. C. MACDONALD, 729 Lipton St., Winnipeg, Manitoba.

J. W. LANDRUM, Kentuckian, of Atlanta, whom I met in Havana, Dec. 1906.—Address S. N. MORGAN, Box 256, Augusta, Ga.

FRIENDS. In Tampa, Fla., with the movies.—Address Capt. Jack Bonavita, Sulphur Springs, Tampa.

JOHN HADDOCK (Sen.) of Dawson.—Address JAS. A. HILLYER, Keystone, Nev.

BROTHER who advertised in 1895-1900 in a St. Jo. paper, write.—Address CLAUD HIATT, care E. Harding, 111 North 18th St., St. Joseph, Mo.

PETER ROGERS of Manchester, Eng., Victoria, B. C. —Address SIDNEY MOORES, 332 Highland Ave., Arlington, N. J.

THEODORE V. JESSUP, age 47 or 48, write.—Address A. M. JESSUP, Box 732, Lamar, Colo.

Please notify us at once when you have found your man.

JOHN R. LEE of Amsterdam, N. Y., 62, 185 pounds, 5 ft. 10 in.; gray hair; slight gray mustache.—Address G. L. L., 291 Guy Park Ave., Amsterdam, N. Y.

ROBERT VERNE STEPHENSON, 23, brown hair, blue eyes, very flat nose, of McKenny, Tex.—Address MISS MARGARET STEPHENSON, 2809 Central Avenue, Tampa, Florida.

JAMES SHANNON of Canada, or William Shannon of Winnipeg. — Address MARGARET SHANNON at 145 West 66th Street, New York.

H. H. HELLMANN.—Address CHARLIE, the Island, Qu. St., San Francisco, Calif.

HENRY FRANCIS, U. S. S. *Trenton*, Samoa, March 24, 1899; Bellaire, O., Oct. 30, 1913.—Address W. M. FAWCETT, 86 New Jersey St., Wheeling, W. Va.

JACK PAVILLA. Once of "Jackly Wonders," acrobats touring America. Last known in 'Frisco.—Address PERCY H. CLIFFORD, care T. H. Bridson, 404 S. D. St., San Mateo, Calif.

JOHN SERRANO, FRANK CRIEGER, C. J. CALHOUN. Please write A. S. HOFFMAN, care ADVENTURE.

CLYDE C. DEOTZ. Last known in Tonala, Chiapis, Mex. Also Grady S. McRae of the Seventy-five Old Timers for the Golden West.—Address W. L. ROGERSON, 327 Lockwood Pl., Jacksonville, Ill.

Please notify us at once when you have found your man.

Please notify us at once when you have found your man.

NO. 56, No. W 107, No. W 140, No. W 150. Please send us your present addresses. Letters forwarded to addresses given us don't reach you.—Address A. S. HOFFMAN, care ADVENTURE.

JACK BONHAM. Born Hastings, Eng. Band of Royal Sussex 1900-6. To Sherbrooke, P. Q., Canada, March 1906. Last heard from Aug., 1906, Sherbrooke. Natural musician. Word wanted by mother.—Address MRS. JEAN BONHAM, care ADVENTURE.

THE following have been inquired for in previous issues of "Lost Trails." They can get name of inquirer from this magazine:

FRANK EPLY RICHARDSON, Captain Billy O'Neil, John F. Moriarty, Wilburn Jay, of Madero Foreign Legion; Archibald Meyrick, lieut., Prince of Wales's Light Horse, Boer War; Ed. McGonigal, U. S. S. *Lancaster;* Heirs of Glen Brook, "Dutchy" Sweidert (phonetic spelling), Walter P. Willbern, Gordon Haskinson (English), Stanley Day; Stanley S. West, newspaper man; Frank McDaniel, pugilist, drummer; Jess Parker, cowpuncher; Taylor McDaniels, L. H. Dwight, Hospital Corps, Philippines, 1900; Thomas George Dixon Morris, Comrades in Co. E. 20th U. S. Infantry, Troop E., 7th U. S. Cavalry; Hospital Corps, 23d U. S. Infantry, 40th U. S. V.; Joe Moulder, Herman Stearns, Any one 4th Texas Vol. Infantry in Spanish War, Richard L. Shepherd, Vancouver and Toronto; Boer Comrades at Ladysmith and along Tugela, also John Murray, Tom Morrows, James McTigh, Jack Ryan; George B. Craven, once of Wilmington *Morning Star;* A. G. Christensen, South America; Jim Conelly, Isaac Raansvaal, Co. I, 9th U. S. I.; Al. H. Brooks, rancher, Canada; Benjamin F. Megie, South America or South Africa; James Dalziel, bark *Socotra;* William Chalmers Smith, Mexico; Willis Cory (Red, Kentuck, or Wins Golden), Philippines, Tex., Calif.; Fred Knudsen, *Red Rock, Balmoral, Willis A. Holden;* Jasper, Key West, Mexico; Old Shipmates British bark *Lyderhorn;* William O'Meara, bark *Guiana,* '86; Miles G. Wiley; Conrad A. Engisser; William Le Vonde; Clarence Rae, P. J. R.; Jimmie Gibney, F. A. Sherwood; Harry G. Robertson, customs, Manila; William McElvain; Capt. C. D. Morine; F. E. Smith, *Olympia* at Manila; John W. ("Red") Bardsley; Big Mentusha; "Lee" or P. M. Morris; Roland Henry Crane; Wm. G. Tice; Patrick, Michael and James Cunningham, comrades of "Lintic" O'Sea on *El Rayo;* Ed (Wessel) Deckard; J. W. McKinzie, formerly U. S. N.; Frank Miller, John and Lee Crawford, Wm. Harson; Capt. Vaughn or any comrades of Percy Tressider; Capt. F. T. Parker; T. S. M. Cottrell, Corp. McEwen, Cooper, Sergt. Dacombe, once Troop B, M. M. P.; also Capt. Nesbitt, V. C., and other comrades of M. M. Marsden; Howard Irvin on *Maitai,* '11; Gulliver, Iquique, '98; Gordon Law, Simon P. Culp; Charles Goolrick, once U. S. N. H. C.; comrades of Capt. F. E. Van Leue; A. S. O'Connor, Bob Ross, Jimmie Van Damme, Hans Kufeke, Jack Griffiths, Julian Harries, Jack Gardiner, once E and C Troops, B. S. A. P.; Edward J. Raeder; Martin Lane, U. S. A., Klondike; Charlie Schaeffer, Sonora; Dick Martel, Hermosillo; Charlie Sutherland, once Bechuanaland Police; Jack Prout, Porcupine; Fred Scott, once Pennsylvania newspaper man; George Dean, whaling bark *Canton;* Oscar Smith, Australian; Percy M. DuBois, R. R. Plum, Joe Enscoe, Chas. Carruthers, Lester Selig, Thos. L. Hogan, Andy Osbourne, once of *Evening Star;* Pete Meissner, Grajervo.

Please notify us at once when you have found your man.

MANUSCRIPTS sent us by the following are being held by us, having been returned to us as unclaimed at the addresses furnished:

Julia A. Sill, New York; W. Lynch, Trenton, N. J.; W. Mack, Pacheca, Mexico; Henry W. Edwards, New York; W. G. Gormley, Ontario, Canada; George Stillions, Chicago, Ill.; Francis Manson, Chicago, Cal.

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THE TRAIL AHEAD

For the benefit of those of our readers who want to know in advance what stories are coming to them in ADVENTURE we set aside this last page of the magazine.

THE NEXT ADVENTURE

WE HAVE already told you—and begun to show you—that ADVENTURE for 1914 is going to be a stronger and more interesting magazine of virile, well told stories than it has ever been before. So much better that it's growing to be almost a new magazine.

Since last month we've practically completed arrangements for a book-length novel giving the last, and most exciting, adventures of one of the three most famous detectives who have ever appeared in fiction or on the stage. We leave you to do a little detective work of your own.

In the meantime we can announce the start in the next issue (May, out April 3) of

"THE LAUGHING CAVALIER" by BARONESS ORCZY

RUNNING complete in four big instalments. You've seen his portrait. Whether or not you recognize him as perhaps the best-known masterpiece of Frans Hals, you know his face, for his picture has been a favorite for reproduction for years.

What you don't know is that he was an ancestor of the Scarlet Pimpernel, whom you've read about or seen in the book or the play bearing his name. As a favor to yourself, don't miss reading the tale of this reckless, dashing, ever-laughing adventurer. Intrigue, politics, love and swords—the Baroness Orczy gives us a story about this free-going soldier of fortune that—well, you'll get half a full-sized book of it in each instalment, but it'll read as fast as a short story.

"FOR LA SOLEDAD" by HAROLD KELLOCK and GEORGE SHEPHERD

A NOVEL complete in the next issue. A young American gets his first engineering job helping to build a railroad in Central America, and by the time he's through he's very much a man—a graduate of the school of hard knocks, business and political intrigues and good, red-blooded adventure. And likely to be married.

A COMPLETE FULL BOOK-LENGTH NOVEL.

A BASEBALL STORY by BOZEMAN BULGER

HERE'S a chance for a look-in on a big-league team on its way to Spring training in Texas. Something happens to that team on the train—hence the story, "The Ivory Dome."

TEXAS POLITICS AND HUMOR

IF YOU don't get a large chuckle out of "Dillingham's Bill" next month it's your fault, not ours. We hate to make you wait till April 3, but you'll have to.

"JUST BAIT"

H. D. COUZENS has given you some bully stories of the South Seas, and the best of them have been about *Billy Englehart*. Here he is again. A man's story.

We Can't Tell

till the next issue is finally closed, just what other stories will be in it. Not till "make-up day." But the following are scheduled and not more than one or two of them can be crowded out:

The Queen of the Species—Prince Sarath Ghosh. (A thrilling "inside" story of the Indian jungle.)
Quinn, Amateur Crook—Charles B. Couchman. (A story that hits you like a bullet.)
The Baby and the Wireless—John A. Heffernan. (Do you old readers remember *Jake Buchmuller?*)
The Heart of the Volunteer—R. B. MacRorie. (Those who served in the Philippines will know this is a *real* story.)
A Woodtick, an Ant, or a Flea—J. U. Giesy. (We may change that title, but it's a story of the "movies" and a good one.)
Ideals—George Vaux Bacon. (A story of city pavements.)
The Return of Billy Blain—Walter Galt. (You've been asking for more about this game young prize-fighter. Here it is.)
The Range Rider—William West. (The conclusion of this strong Western story.)

Watch for the MAY ADVENTURE, out April 3.

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Are Your Hands Tied?

Do you want to get on—SUCCEED—earn more money? Is there a certain line of work in which you think you could do better—if you only had the training? Or a certain kind of position you would like to hold—only you fear your "hands are tied"?

Don't let your ambition die! Don't think your hands are tied! Don't think that you can't strike out for advancement and *success*—that you do not dare, because you must eke out your daily bread—that you must go on in the same old rut as long as you live.

Get out of the crowd of ordinary *untrained* men—whose each day's work puts them *no further ahead.*

Start your advancement NOW—mark the coupon with a cross opposite the occupation you prefer, mail it *to-day*, and let the International Correspondence Schools give you full information on how they can *help you* to succeed—costs but postage—you incur no obligation.

Simply let the I. C. S. tell you how they can assist you to become an EXPERT in your chosen work—in your spare time—at home—no matter where you live or how little you now earn.

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Structural Engineer	IndustrialDesigning
Concrete Construction	Commercial Law
Mechan. Engineer	Automobile Running
Mechanical Draftsman	Teacher
Refrigeration Engineer	English Branches
Civil Engineer	Good English for Every One
Surveyor	Agriculture
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